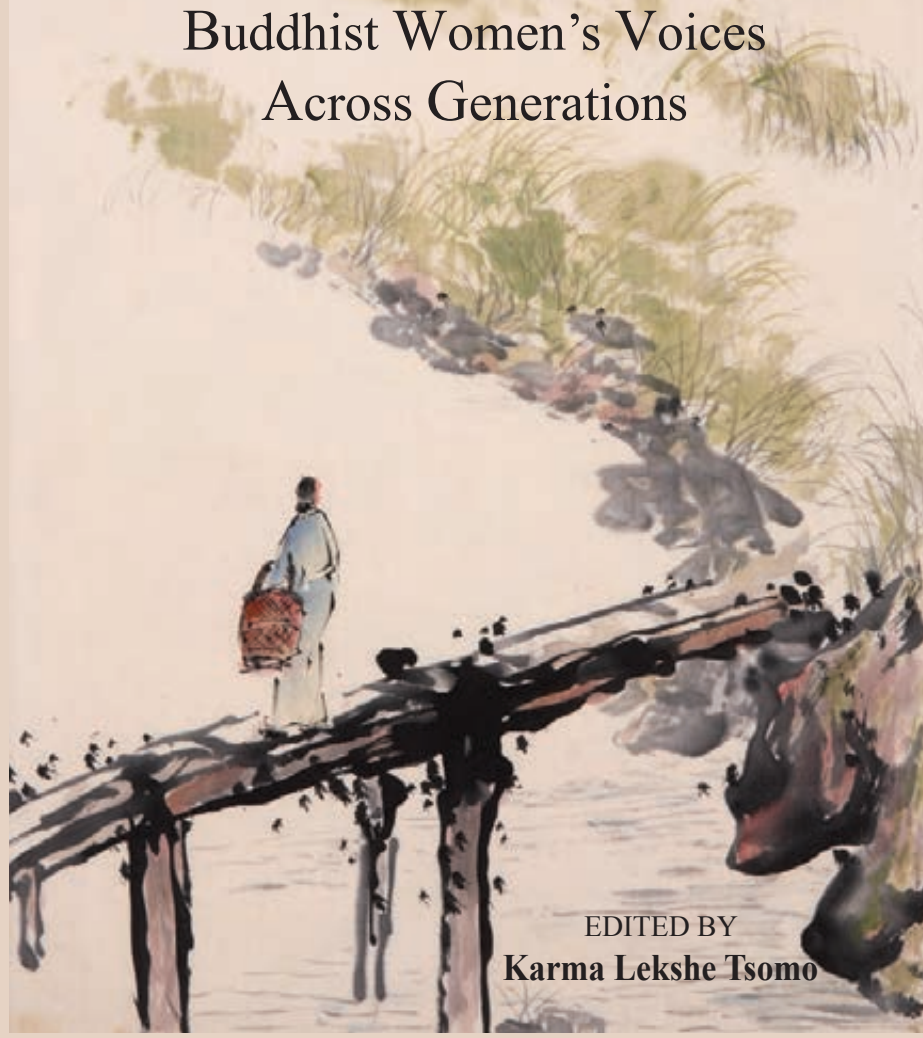


A traditional Chinese ink wash painting. In the foreground, a person in a light blue robe stands on a dark, rustic wooden bridge, carrying a large, round, woven basket. The bridge spans a body of water. In the background, there are dense, tall reeds or grasses along the riverbank, rendered in shades of green and brown. The overall style is minimalist and expressive, typical of traditional Chinese art.

BRIDGING WORLDS

Buddhist Women's Voices
Across Generations

EDITED BY
Karma Lekshe Tsomo

First Edition: Yuan Chuan Press 2004

Second Edition: Sakyadhita 2018

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Bridging Worlds

Buddhist Women's Voices Across Generations

EDITED BY

Karma Lekshe Tsomo

7th Sakyadhita International
Conference on Buddhist Women

With a Message from His Holiness
the XIVth Dalai Lama

SAKYADHITA | HONOLULU, HAWAII



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MESSAGE from HIS HOLINESS the XIVth DALAI LAMA

I am happy to know that the Seventh Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women is being held in Taiwan and that it is to be addressed by a wide range of speakers from across the Buddhist world. It is my firm belief that we Buddhists have a significant contribution to make to the welfare of humanity according to our Buddhist tradition and philosophy.

I am encouraged to know that practical steps are being taken to train women teachers, to improve educational prospects for women and create a communications network among Buddhist women, whatever tradition they belong to. Within the Tibetan community, unlike in past Tibet, we have introduced programs for serious study of Buddhist philosophy in some of our nunneries here in India over the past two decades or so.

In this context I know that many people attending your conference have a great interest in the propagation of the *bhikṣuṇī* ordination. A great deal of research has already been done on this, which in turn has raised a lot of issues that remain to be resolved by an assembly of Vinaya experts. Vinaya issues are and always have been complex. If we look back at the historical early Buddhist assemblies, even then questions of Vinaya were central to discussions.

I have felt that the reinstitution of the *bhikṣuṇī* ordination is very important. After all, the Buddha confirmed that both women and men have equal opportunity and potential to practice the Dharma and to achieve its goals. I believe we have an obligation to uphold this view.

Now, as to how the re-institution of the *bhikṣuṇī* ordination should be done, this is a matter for the Saṅgha to decide. No single person has any authority to take such a decision. Some of my friends and colleagues have suggested that as the Dalai Lama I could issue a decree or make a decision, but this is not a matter on which any individual, whoever he or she is, can decide. It is a matter for the Saṅgha community.

It would be helpful if this matter were discussed at an international assembly of the Saṅgha. Representatives of all the major Vinaya traditions should be present. The issue should be dealt with on the basis of thorough research and discussion. If we can assemble some genuine scholars as well as good practitioners, who have more open minds and are respected, to discuss this issue thoroughly, I believe we can achieve a positive result.

I offer my greetings to all the participants, as well as my sincere prayers that your conference may be successful in realizing practical ways of supporting women who seek inner peace and, through that, greater peace in the world.



Acknowledgements

This volume emerged from the 7th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women in Taiwan, an international collaborative effort involving more than 100 dedicated volunteers and benefactors. Although it is not possible to acknowledge the organizational skills and financial support of each person individually, Sakyadhita: International Association of Buddhist Women is deeply grateful for the generosity, good will, and hard work of each and every one of them.

First and foremost, we would like to express our sincere appreciation to Ven. Shig Hiu Wan, a guiding light for Buddhist women, who kindly hosted the 7th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women at Huafan University. Dr. Sun Ma, the president of Huafan University, and her conscientious faculty and staff worked tirelessly to make the conference a success. Huafan University was the ideal setting for the conference, with a newly completed Illumination Hall for the plenary sessions, student dormitories to accommodate participants from around the world, a vegetarian restaurant where volunteer chefs provided sumptuous meals, and a sparkling new Buddha hall for daily chanting and meditation. We are most grateful for having the ideal facilities for this historic gathering.

The success of the 7th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women was due to the cooperation of Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist Women, Huafan University, National Taiwan University Center for Buddhist Studies, Huafan Cultural Foundation, Bodhi Foundation, Lotus Buddhist Ashram, and the Chinese Young Buddhist Association. The conference organizers are deeply grateful for the generous support of the Chinese Bhiksuni Association, Ocean of Wisdom Buddhist Cultural Foundation Yuanzhao Temple, Haiming Temple, Xiangguang Temple, Baiyun Temple, Foguang Cultural Foundation, the Ministry of Education, and the

Ministry of Cultural Affairs of the Republic of China. Thanks also go to Lu Coral Company and Mr. Qiu.

The Conference Organizing Committee was a model of international cooperation. I was privileged to coordinate the event with Ven. Shig Hiu Wan (Honorary President, Founder of Huafan University), Dr. Sun Ma (Conference Vice President, President of Huafan University), Ven. Heng-ching Shih (Conference Advisor, National Taiwan University), Ven. Renlang Shi (Executive General, Huafan University), Dr. Qingzhao Liao (Secretary General, Huafan University), Dr. Yuling Christie Chang (Executive Secretary, National Zhengzhi University), Dr. Yuzhen Li (Executive Secretary, National Qinghua University), Secretary Shuyu Li (Secretarial Section, Huafan University), Dr. Poyong Lai (Huafan University), Dr. Elise DeVido (Translation, National Taiwan Normal University), Stefania Travagnin (Translation), Dr. Jianji Lu (Editing, Huafan University), and Chenli Kevin Zhou (Graphics). In addition, we wish to express our heartfelt appreciation to the following administrators of Huafan University: Dr. Yongsheng Yang, Dr. Miaoji Huang, Dean Menghan Li, Accounting Director Xinji Xiao, Public Relations Director Lihua Ye, as well as Dr. Lihua Xiao of National Taiwan University. We wish to gratefully acknowledge the compassion and skillful means of each member.

As Coordinator of the International Conference Planning Committee, I also wish to express my sincere thanks to the members of that committee: Carol Stevens (Secretary), Rebecca Paxton (Treasurer), Joanne Molyneaux (Registration), Paula Heim and Elizabeth Zielinska (Publicity), Jennifer Lane and Rebecca Paxton (Editing), Kaiser Chang (Internet), and Milton Pang (Printing). The smooth coordination of activities on the ground was made possible by the tireless efforts of the Taiwan Planning Committee, especially during the last weeks of the conference preparations: Dr. Yuling Christie Chang (Coordinator), Dr. Yuchen Li, Dr. Elise DeVido, and Stefania Travagnin. The diligent efforts of all members of the Taiwan Planning Committee in compiling and translating the conference papers are greatly appreciated. We are indebted to Ms. Hui-Yu (Rosa) Lien and the Chinese Young Buddhist Association for organizing the temple tour following the conference. Additional translators and simultaneous interpreters included Dr. Chaneung Park-Miller, Ven. Hui Guo, and Dr. Eunsu Cho.

We wish to express our profound appreciation to Dr. Helen Hu, who has generously shared her original brush paintings to enhance the chapters in this book.

We are especially grateful for the exemplary leadership of the late Ven. Shig Hiu Wan, without whose inspiration the Seventh Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women would not have taken place. Her artwork,

“Woman on the Bridge,” which appears on the cover of the conference brochure, program, and this book, exemplifies the role that she has played for four decades in bridging cultures and linking Buddhist women of the world. We dedicate this volume to her as a token of our profound appreciation.





INTRODUCTION

KARMA LEKSHE TSOMO

Since 1987, an international coalition of women has been working at the grassroots level for change, both in society and in Buddhist institutions. At the end of the First International Conference on Buddhist Women, held outdoors under a tent in Bodhgaya, the participants founded Sakyadhita, “Daughters of the Buddha,” the International Association of Buddhist Women. This coalition has become a powerful movement that stretches around the globe, across boundaries of gender, ethnicity, class, and religious tradition. In theory, at least, both feminist values and Buddhist values apply equally to women of all cultural, economic, social, and religious backgrounds. The global women’s movement is an ideal staging ground for testing this hypothesis.

The globalization of Buddhism is multidirectional and multivalent. The current transmission of Buddhism to the west is not simply the importation of Buddhism to non-Asian countries, nor simply a two-way street, but a multi-directional intersection of ideas and practices. It would be a gross oversimplification to say that the exchange is completely balanced and egalitarian, however, since feelings of cultural superiority are apparent on all sides. In the Buddhist centers of Asia, there is a sense that they have “got it right,” whereas Western Buddhists are neophytes admirably struggling to understand the tradition, but hobbled by a lack of commitment, discipline, and good manners. In the Buddhist centers of non-Asian nations, there is also a sense that they have “got it right,” whereas Asian Buddhist centers have mixed Buddhism with spiritualism, ritual, and magic (“cultural baggage”), or degenerated into merit-making. Asian Buddhists base their claims of authenticity on tradition, whereas Western Buddhists base their claims on sanitized twentieth-century reinterpretations of tradition. In fact, both approaches are equally reconstructions of earlier forms of Buddhism that can never be completely known and both are equally dynamic processes of continual, ongoing reinterpretation.

The goal of Sakyadhita is to bring Asian and Western women together to learn about each other's traditions and experiences, and to create opportunities where women, especially Asian Buddhist women, can speak in their own voices, tell their own stories, and reflect on their own experiences. Thus far, most of Sakyadhita's activities have taken place in Asia. I believe that this focus on Asia is justified for two reasons. First, among an estimated 300 million Buddhist women worldwide, approximately 99 percent are Asian and, over the past 2500 years of history, Asian Buddhist women's experiences have rarely been heard. Second, Asia is where the needs of Buddhist women are greatest. For these reasons, Sakyadhita has increasingly become concerned with social justice issues, in addition to providing encouragement and support for women's education, training, and ordination.

The intersection of Asian and Western voices at the Sakyadhita conferences has had many benefits. The gatherings have encouraged an awareness of other traditions, beliefs, and practices, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist. Participants have broadened their knowledge of Buddhism, including philosophical concepts, meditation, and the commonalities and differences among the Buddhist traditions. The conferences foster cross-cultural awareness, self-confidence, access to education, and research, especially research on Buddhist women. There have also been many challenges. Here I would like to examine the nature of the international collaboration that has occurred over the past 15 years to understand the contributions of the diverse participants in this cultural and spiritual dialogue. To more clearly understand the Buddhist women movement's strengths, weaknesses, and future, I will focus on three areas of Sakyadhita's development: ideals, challenges, and achievements. I believe that this dialogue serves as a catalyst not only for the world's 300 million Buddhist women, but for social change globally.

IDEALS OF THE BUDDHIST WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

When Sakyadhita was incorporated in August 1987, the specific purposes of the organization were to develop an international organization, provide guidance and assistance to Buddhist women, encourage Buddhist women to improve their education and practice, create a network of communications for Buddhist women, promote the Buddhadharma, work in harmony with all Buddhist traditions, encourage women as teachers of Buddhadharma, investigate the possibility of establishing the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha where it does not exist, conduct research into Vinaya, and promote world peace. When we went to revise the Sakyadhita bylaws in January 2000, we realized that we had accomplished almost all our original objectives, except for world peace. So we revised our goals upward. We aspired to promote ecumenical dialogue and

harmony among the Buddhist traditions, work for the physical and spiritual welfare of the world's Buddhist women, establish an international alliance of Buddhist women, work toward an international Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha, and encourage compassionate social action for the benefit of humanity.

Reflecting the primary needs of those who gathered at the first Sakyadhita conference, our initial goals emphasized Buddhist education and ordination. At that time, the issue of full ordination for women was so controversial that we merely aspired to *investigate the possibility* of establishing the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha where it does not exist, because we feared a backlash from conservative elements of the Buddhist community, especially conservative *bhikkhus*. In 1987, the notion of equality between nuns and monks was considered so radical in Asian Buddhist societies that Sakyadhita members dared not express it publicly for fear of jeopardizing their objectives. As the movement gained momentum, we became more confident and explicit about our goal of working toward gender equality and the establishment of an international Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha. Our revised goals not only reflected an increased confidence, but also a strengthened commitment to work for gender justice, equal educational opportunities, and the equal rights of Buddhist women to receive ordination.

CHALLENGES OF A GLOBAL WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

The first challenge Sakyadhita faces is language. At the Sakyadhita international conferences, participants speak 20 to 30 different languages, and the irony of Buddhist women in a post-colonial era having to use English to communicate is not lost. As women gain greater access to education, this problem is easing, which highlights the significance of better education programs for women.

The second challenge is social class. The conference organizers strive to include women of all different segments of society, to broaden the conversation and hear as many voices as possible. We recognize that the use of English as a medium of communication in this dialogue privileges the educated English-speaking classes. Language reflects economic privilege, since English-medium instruction is expensive and therefore the privilege of wealthier segments of society.

The third challenge is economics. The Buddhist women's movement is a grassroots effort, fueled by idealism and maintained by volunteers. Sakyadhita has received little support for its work in either Asia or the West, either from academic institutions, Buddhist institutions, or funding agencies. With the exception of donations from a few individuals, such as Ven. Shinchun, Ven. Zhengzhi, and the Yang family, it has been a continuous struggle to bridge the gap between extreme wealth and extreme poverty in the Buddhist world. This

serious lack of financial support has not only limited the number of women who are able to participate in the Sakyadhita conferences, but it has also limited the scope of Sakyadhita's work overall.

Another challenge is educational development. At the first Sakyadhita conference in Bodhgaya, India, in 1987, many of the women who attended were illiterate. Many Asian Buddhist women lacked adequate education; very few had received higher education and many had received no education at all. Since then, however, the educational standard of participants and Buddhist women in general has steadily improved. Quite a few women have enrolled at universities and a number of them have completed doctoral studies. University degrees are certainly not the only benchmark of learning, but they are the most widely recognized academic credentials. At present many women do not have access to the advanced training in languages and research methodologies that would equip them to document their own histories and experiences. Sakyadhita encourages education and research among Buddhist women, so that they can tell their own stories and help recover their own rich histories. A series of peer-reviewed publications had given Buddhist women a voice and helped bring their struggles and achievements to a wider audience.¹ Although little attention has been paid to Buddhist women in the fields of Buddhist studies and women's studies thus far, these publications provide resources for future crosscultural studies.

Another challenge to the Buddhist women's movement has been cultural differences. Not only do Buddhist women come from a wide range of ethnic, national, cultural, economic, educational, and class backgrounds, they include both laywomen and nuns, urbanites and villagers. The interests of Buddhist women are therefore vastly varied. Generally speaking, Asian women are concerned with cultural preservation: organizing Buddhist celebrations, supporting Buddhist monks, and teaching Buddhist values to their children. Their Buddhist practice is largely communal, focused on accumulating merit through service and to the monks and financial contributions to maintain their local temples. Generally speaking, Buddhist women from Western backgrounds have different interests. Their Buddhist practice is largely individual, such as meditation, retreats, and reading, and includes a wide range of social concerns – gender equality, social engagement, and political action. Forging alliances among these different interest groups is an ongoing challenge.

Further challenges include localism, the inertia of tradition, slow organizational development, and internalized sexism. The inertia of tradition applies not just to traditional cultures, but to all persons and societies that uncritically prefer to maintain the status quo. Internalized sexism includes feelings of inadequacy and patterns of self-deprecation that affect our relationships with both women and men. These patterns includes the ways

women enable and perpetuate sexism. In the Buddhist world, for example, women are often inclined to give large donations to male teachers, as if overcompensating for their unworthiness. Women may show a preference for serving, supporting, and practicing with male teachers. These habitual patterns, often unconscious, send a message that men are somehow more worthy of respect and deserving of support than women. These sexist tendencies will only change as women become more fully aware, better educated in Buddhism, and move into teaching positions. Women's liberation, in the fullest sense of the word, will be hampered until women fully expunge gender discrimination in their own thoughts and actions.

One of the ongoing challenges of the Buddhist women's movement has been the difficulty of linking Buddhist women together. The communications network that Sakyadhita has developed, extensive as it is, does not reach all Buddhist women. It has been especially difficult to establish links with women in Japan, Mongolia, Myanmar (Burma), and also with Fujinkai and other Buddhist women's groups in the Japanese American community, for reasons that are social, cultural, and economic. For example, we would very much like to include women from Myanmar at the Sakyadhita conferences and have made intensive efforts to invite women from China, but the present governments of these countries do not issue travel documents without official government sanction. Inviting women from developing countries like Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Mongolia requires sponsorship and translators. Grassroots efforts to reach women in countries like Laos, Indonesia, and the Philippines means traveling there in person to meet people and explain Sakyadhita's work.

In the last 50 years Buddhist institutions have suffered unimaginable losses, including hundreds of thousands of monastics, regarded as keepers of the culture, who lost their lives under despotic regimes and in wars.² It remains to be seen whether women will gain admittance to established Buddhist institutions and be able to transform them from within, or whether they will decide to create alternative structures such as Sakyadhita, independent of government and established male-dominated religious institutions. As much as Buddhist women may wish to chart an independent path, many are hampered by a lack of education and financial support. "Real estate. It's all about real estate," commented Ann Mac Neil, Canadian nun for almost 30 years. Women's disempowerment within Buddhist institutions puts them in a dispossessed space that is both freeing and restricting. Both working within the system and outside it entail risks.

BUDDHIST WOMEN'S ACHIEVEMENTS

The achievements of the contemporary international Buddhist women's movements include creating an international alliance of Buddhist women that holds conferences and encourages spiritual development, education, research, publications, and compassionate social action. Sakyadhita has created an international network among 2,000 Buddhist individuals, monasteries, and associations. Sakyadhita has organized a series of biannual international conferences on Buddhist women as a forum for women's voices to be heard. Before 1987, Buddhist women were rarely invited to participate in Buddhist conferences, so the Sakyadhita conference were a conscious attempt to provide a forum for Buddhist women's concerns. Before 1987, Buddhist women had virtually no voice in Buddhist associations and institutions, which is why they decided to create Sakyadhita ("Daughters of the Buddha"): International Association of Buddhist Women in the first place. Sakyadhita was founded as a global forum in which Buddhist women's concerns would be heard, acknowledged, and valued. The international conferences held in Bangkok in 1991, Colombo in 1993, Ladakh in 1995, Phnom Penh in 1997/1998, Nepal in 2000, Taipei in 2002, and Korea in 2004 have drawn attention to Buddhist women's issues. The gatherings have generated numerous publications, education initiatives, research efforts, practice center, and social welfare projects. The two central concerns that have been voiced repeatedly at these gatherings are the urgent need for opportunities for education and ordination among Buddhist women.

The international conferences held so far have all taken place in Asia. Two North American Sakyadhita conferences have also been held, in Santa Barbara in 1990 and Claremont in 1996, and others are envisioned in the future. There are several reasons why the international conferences so far have been held in Asia. First, the vast majority of Buddhist women live in Asia. Second, it is less expensive to hold conferences in Asia, which keeps costs down and allows more women to attend. Because most Asian Buddhist women are financially disadvantaged, it makes sense to hold the conferences where as many women as possible have access to them.

Another achievement of Sakyadhita has been the publication of six books based on the Sakyadhita conferences and the numerous other publications on Buddhist women that have been directly inspired by the conferences. The major themes that emerge in these writings are the enormous contributions that women have made despite the patriarchal nature of Buddhist institutions. Traditionally women have shown little interest in gaining power within official Buddhist institutions, remaining in the shadows and continuing their practices privately. The fact remains that women's lack of authority within traditional

Buddhist institutions has limited their access to the benefits of these institutions, namely, religious education, ordination, meditation training, and even such culture-specific benefits as being recognized as a reincarnate lama in Tibetan society. These limitations have hindered women from achieving their full potential and from gaining full acceptance in traditional Buddhist societies. The importance of women gaining a voice in Buddhist institutions raises the question: Who speaks for Buddhist women? Because Buddhist women comprise at least half of Buddhists worldwide, in the contemporary climate of gender equity it is reasonable for women to become equal partners in Buddhist dialogue and Buddhist institutions. Because most Buddhist women live in Asia, it is reasonable and desirable for the authentic voices of Asian Buddhist women to be heard in Buddhist dialogue and institutions. Asian Buddhist women are responsible for charting their own course and formulating their own culturally appropriate strategies to achieve gender equity, .

Despite financial limitations, many tangible results have emerged from the international Buddhist women's movement. After attending and being inspired by the Sakyadhita conferences, women and men have returned to create schools, women's shelters, monasteries, and retreat centers for women their own countries. An example is Jamyang Foundation, an educational initiative for Buddhist women in developing countries that has created a network of education projects for women in Bangladesh and the Indian Himalayas. Another is the institute for educating and training nuns that has been established near Colombo by Sakyadhita Sri Lanka. There are many other concrete examples.

The global Buddhist women's movement nourished by Sakyadhita has also had many intangible results. The most obvious of these is a marked increase of feminist awareness among Buddhist women. Although "feminism" and feminist ideas are often misconstrued as arrogant self-assertion or manipulations to achieve dominance, the value of helping women recognize their human potential has gained currency and is being increasingly accepted and valued. In the beginning of Sakyadhita's history, members avoided overtly discussing issues of gender equality. After running into stiff opposition, many retreated a pace. Women's equality was widely viewed as a threat to traditional Buddhist institutions, which have been male dominated since the beginning. Now, after fifteen years of education and dialogue, Buddhist women leaders no longer avoid stating their goal of achieving equal rights for Buddhist women.

There is still much work to be done in the sphere of consciousness raising, however. In Chinese Buddhist monasteries, for instance, nuns still call each other by the titles "brother" and "uncle," instead of "sister" and "aunt," because male monastics are regarded as normative and assigned a higher value. In Tibetan and other Buddhist societies, women continue to hope and pray

for a male rebirth, free from the hardships and sufferings that women face, without recognizing the effect that wishing to be male may have on their own identity and self-awareness. As dialogue progress, Buddhist women become aware of the stark contradiction: if male is the standard of human perfection, women's struggle is hopeless, in this lifetime at least. Even if women attempt to degender themselves in an effort to match that impossible "ideal," they can never succeed. The androgynous ideal, illustrated by the bodhisattvas who seem to rise above gender characteristics, is no real solution to the dilemma of sexism if it means subverting or erasing women's gender identity. Some assume that the androgynous image of the monastic is imposed on nuns to degender or desexual them. It is important to take into account the perceptions of Buddhist nuns themselves, however, who view their gender-neutral dress and shaved heads as a symbol of liberation from the gender-stereotypical dress and hairstyles imposed on women by society. These are among the many issues of Buddhism and gender that warrant further consideration.

Consciousness-raising for Buddhist women tends to follow common trajectory: (1) to develop confidence, (2) to seek education, (3) to gain credibility (start to be taken seriously), (4) to transforming attitudes, and (5) to transform institutions. The Sakyadhita conferences and the alliances of friendship, information, and encouragement have helped Buddhist women enormously in developing confidence. The next step, education, begins with literacy and proceeds to basic education, Buddhist education, and eventually, for some, higher education. With education, societal attitudes toward Buddhist women and their capabilities improve dramatically. The work of transforming Buddhist institutions is the most challenging task of all, because it means directly confronting male power and privilege.

Another achievement of the Buddhist women's movement has been to open dialogue on the full ordination of women. Since the First Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women in 1987, Sakyadhita's goal of creating opportunities for the ordination of women has been enunciated clearly. In 1993, when the second Sakyadhita conference was held in Sri Lanka, participants were forbidden by the Sri Lankan government to discuss the issue of full ordination for women.³ Now, just ten years later, women's right to full ordination in Sri Lanka is a *fait accompli*, with several hundred nuns already ordained as *bhikkhūnīs*.⁴

The issue of full ordination is important to Buddhist women for many reasons. First, access to full ordination means that women are full-fledged members of the Buddhist community. Second, it signals women's equal status within the various Buddhist traditions, giving nuns access to the same privileges and educational opportunities as fully ordained monks. Third, it gives women confidence, affirming their equal spiritual worth and potential. Fourth, it gives

women encouragement to become teachers, role models, and spiritual mentors to others, especially other women.

Even today, however, the majority of Buddhist women who choose monastic life are perennially consigned to the status of a novice or “a laywoman with a shaved head.” The subordinate status of women within the monastic framework obviously cannot be separated from women’s subordinate status within Buddhist societies in general. Nuns and laywomen in traditions with full ordination for women – China, Korea, Taiwan, and Vietnam – have achieved acclaim as spiritual leaders, scholars, educators, writers, and pioneers in social transformation. Nuns and laywomen in societies without a tradition of full ordination for women – Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Laos, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Tibet – are consigned women to a lesser status in the religious establishment, a subordination that affects attitudes toward women in society as a whole. Gaining access to full ordination opens up many possibilities for women.

Inspired by Sakyadhita, full ordination is gradually becoming a reality in some of these countries, establishing a foundation for many advances for women. But there is still considerable opposition to the establishment of a *Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha* in some countries and a lack of awareness about the benefits of gaining equal status, especially among the nuns themselves. Bringing the subordinate position of women in Buddhism into the open and encouraging dialogue on the ordination of nuns has prompted a new-found feminist awareness among women in developing countries. Research and education on the ordination issue is not only essential for gaining equal status for Buddhist nuns, it is critical for improving conditions for Buddhist women everywhere.

Another very fruitful outcome of the Sakyadhita conferences has been crosscultural exchange. Up to now, much attention has focused on the transmission of Buddhism to the West,⁵ and very little attention has been paid to recent developments in Asian Buddhist societies or to the exciting crossfertilization of Western and Buddhist thought that is occurring in venues as far-flung as San Francisco and Kuala Lumpur, Sydney and Kathmandu. By bringing Buddhist women together from a wide variety of traditions and perspectives, the Sakyadhita conferences have helped women to discover their distinctiveness and their commonality.

When Asian women attend the Sakyadhita conferences, they bring their deep-felt Buddhist faith, respect for tradition, strong commitment, an inherited knowledge of basic Buddhist principles, and a sincere willingness to learn. Western women bring their independence, egalitarianism, education, organizational abilities, and resources. Not all of these women identify themselves as Buddhists. Christians, Hindus, Muslims, secular humanists, and every shade of eclectic spiritual practice have been represented. And not all

participants are women. There have been male participants and speakers at every conference.

Asian Buddhists are proud and happy that Western people are adopting Buddhism, some even becoming monastics. They are pleased that Buddhism has become part of Western intellectual discourse and finds a place in Western universities where Buddhist ideas are heard in dialogues on science, psychology, environment, death, and other topics. At the same time, they are concerned that Buddhism be presented in ways that are authentic and accurate. For example, they are dismayed when certain unorthodox practices, such as trances and spirit mediums, are spotlighted in studies on Buddhism, to the neglect of mainstream views and practices. They are concerned that well-funded, high-profile teachers and organizations are highlighted to the neglect of more humble teachers and organizations, and that problematic aspects of their societies are widely publicized, while less charismatic but genuine practitioners may go unnoticed. Seeing their traditional values under threat from so many directions, many would prefer to sweep the scandals under the carpet, preferring to put forth the positive images of Buddhist tradition that they cherish.

A major outcome of the crosscultural exchanges fostered by Sakyadhita and the Buddhist women's movement over the last 15 years has been a surge of interest in research on Buddhist women. I am aware of dozens of Master's theses, several doctoral dissertations, and a number of books that focus on Buddhist women in particular traditions, documenting the history and struggles of women in Thailand, Sri Lanka, Japan, China, and Nepal. Some of these scholars have participated in the Sakyadhita conferences. Although some scholars fail to maintain contact with their informants, many scholars develop friendships and maintain close ties that lead to further collaboration and mutual support. Sakyadhita promotes solidarity and mutual respect among women of vastly different backgrounds and has become a resource for students, scholars, and practitioners alike. Keenly aware of the dangers of appropriation and misappropriation, Sakyadhita strives to empower local women to document and critically analyze their own lives and traditions.

The women who are emerging as Buddhist leaders are in a unique position to serve as culture brokers. Because they are not represented in the higher echelons of official Buddhist power structures, national or international, they are not invested in maintaining those structures. That allows women to reconceptualize their respective traditions and to effect changes both within traditional structures and outside them. Their disempowered status gives them more flexibility and may therefore give them more freedom and make them more effective in negotiating the variables of gender, religion, and ethnicity, East and West, that are involved in the new "international Buddhism." As the variables in this process of negotiation demonstrate, gender equity is not the

only issue at stake here; through a wider lens, we are also opening a dialogue about who constructs the categories, who controls them, and how women may reenvision them. There is no question that males have constructed the categories of Buddhist society until now: laywoman, layman, novice nun, novice monk, fully ordained nun, fully ordained nun – and an additional category, the two-year probationary nun (*śīkṣamāṇā*) status that applies only to women and not to men. The predicament that Buddhists now face is how to adapt these traditions in response to a new egalitarian global ethos.

The Buddhist women's movement aptly illustrates what feminist scholarship is revealing: that many strands of meaning and narrative are interwoven in women's stories. In Buddhist women's narratives are woven strands of their struggles against cultural domination, political domination, and patriarchal domination. numerous cultural constraints on women in Buddhism. Denying educational opportunities for women denies them the opportunity to become qualified teachers, role models, and examples of what is possible for women. If the system that authorizes teachers is perpetually in male hands, women face systemic exclusion. Recognizing these injustices, Buddhist women must work to gain equal access to opportunities for scholarship, practice, and the pathways to full authority in the Buddhist tradition.

SEVENTH SAKYADHITA INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON BUDDHIST WOMEN

Sakyadhita: International Association of Buddhist Women was founded by a group of nuns and laywomen in 1987 in Bodhgaya, India. Its mission is to help improve women's lives and human society using methods of compassion and skillful means. Although the theme of each Sakyadhita conference is different, the gatherings have the same goals: to promote women's potential, to foster mutual understanding, to work for the benefit of others, and ultimately to achieve their own spiritual liberation. The Seventh Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women continued to pursue these goals and also explores new directions: interpreting the Buddhist teachings crossculturally, recovering women's contributions and experiences across many generations, and recognizing women's international roles.

In today's increasingly complex world, human beings face new challenges and opportunities everyday. Today's Buddhist women are playing leading roles in building bridges of crosscultural and interreligious cooperation that transcend geographical and cultural boundaries. The Sakyadhita conferences have offered opportunities for international dialogue by inviting Buddhist women from Taiwan, other parts of Asia, and around the world to introduce themselves, exchange ideas on topics of mutual interest, share their experiences,

and develop strategies for women's spiritual and social evolution. The Seventh Sakyadhita Conference provided insight into the religious lives and achievements of long-forgotten as well as contemporary Buddhist women, and highlighted the abundant potential Buddhist women have for transforming our troubled world.

Sakyadhita selected Taipei as the venue for the Seventh Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women to acknowledge the contributions that Taiwan's Buddhist women have made and help create alliances between Taiwanese Buddhists and the international Buddhist community. Both *bhikṣuṇīs* and laywomen in Taiwan are well known for their achievements in education, spiritual discipline, and social engagement. To promote communications and dialogue among Taiwan's Buddhist women and others throughout the world, a national branch of Sakyadhita has been established in Taiwan, as has happened in other countries that have hosted Sakyadhita conferences.

The opening ceremony of the Seventh Sakyadhita Conference was held at National Taiwan University. As is customary at Buddhist events, the ceremony opened with Buddhist chanting. Nuns from Burma, Cambodia, Nepal, and Sri Lanka chanted the *Turning the Dharma Wheel Sutra* in Pali and nuns from many different countries chanted the *Heart of Wisdom Sutra* in four languages: Chinese, Korean, Tibetan, and Vietnamese. Words of welcome were presented by Mr. Weichao Chen, president of National Taiwan University; Dr. Sun Ma, president of Huaan University; Yu-ling Christie Chang, coordinator of the Taiwan Planning Committee; and myself, as president of Sakyadhita International. Keynote addresses were presented by Hsiu-lien Annette Lu, vice president of the Republic of China, and Ven. Tenzin Palmo, director of Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery in India.

The week's events then shifted to Huaan University, situated in the scenic hills of southeast Taipei County. Huaan University incorporates Chinese and Buddhist cultural values into college education and prides itself on its high educational ideals, energetic faculty, and peaceful surroundings. Huaan University was founded in 1990 by Ven. Shig Hiu Wan, a renowned Buddhist nun, artist, and educator. Initially known as Huaan Institute of Technology, it was reorganized as Huaan College of Humanities and Technology in 1993, and accredited as a full-fledged university in 1997. Huaan started with only one college and has now expanded to three, with ten departments and three graduate institutes. It offers undergraduate programs in Chinese, foreign languages, philosophy, mechanical engineering, electronic engineering, industrial management, information management, fine arts, architecture, and industrial design. Graduate programs include Asian humanities, mechatronics, and industrial management.

EDUCATION THAT ENLIGHTENS

Huafan University is the first officially recognized institute of higher education founded by a Buddhist organization in Taiwan. Ven. Shig Hiu Wan fashioned Huafan University's educational philosophy to foster self-awakening, termed "education that enlightens." This philosophy incorporates the humanistic ideals of both Confucianism and Buddhism, based on Chinese ethics and the Buddhist ideal of great compassion. In addition to knowledge, it nurtures the human development, wisdom and compassion, and a commitment to benefit all humankind. To achieve these goals, Huafan University emphasizes theory and practice equally. Surrounded by natural beauty, Huafan University is a holistic learning environment. On this peaceful campus, far from the hustle and bustle of city life, students and faculty can devote themselves wholeheartedly to learning, teaching, and research.

Ven. Shig Hiu Wan is a native of Nan-hai, Kuangtung. In her younger years, she learned brush painting from Kao Chien-fu, Master of the Ling-nan School. She was a visiting professor at Tagore University in India, where she traveled extensively. She is well known for her poetry and numerous publications on various aspects of Buddhism. Her paintings have been featured in art exhibitions all over the world, but her primary concern has been education. After directing the Graduate Buddhist Institute at the Chinese Cultural University, she founded the Lotus Buddhist Ashram, the Institute for Sino-Indian Buddhist Studies, and initiated a series of biannual International Conferences on Buddhist Education. In 1989, she created Huafan University atop Talun Mountain, the first of its kind in 2,000 years of Chinese Buddhism. In 1997 Ven. Hiu Wan received the Cultural Award, the nation's highest civic honor, for her lifelong dedication and achievements.

BUDDHIST WOMEN AT THE CROSSROADS

Buddhist women are now at a crossroads, poised to create new goals, a wider base of support, and closer links among the Asian, Asian American, and Euroamerican Buddhist communities. Sakyadhita and the global Buddhist women's movement face many questions. Looking toward the future, what should be the central focus of our energies? Does the Buddhist women's movement need an organization? If so, what form should it take – a formal, structured organization or an informal fellowship of women who gather occasionally to discuss specific issues. Should Sakyadhita be a vehicle to channel funds to worthwhile Buddhist women's projects? If so, how can a

funding base be created? Where should the organization be headquartered and administered? What are its immediate goals and how will it be structured and supported? How can the organization equitably foster teamwork and partnership internationally?

To be relevant and meaningful in today's chaotic and violent world, Buddhists must be willing to address complex social and ethical issues: racial justice, gender equity, human rights, sexual ethics, environmental ethics, bioethics, and other interrelated concerns. Like many other Buddhists, I feel that it is urgent to speak out against sexism, racism, and other forms of injustice and oppression and refuse to be intimidated by the forces of violence and domination. Buddhists today cannot ethically closet themselves away from the problems of society, but must work to eliminate them for the welfare of humanity. The Buddhist values of tolerance and acceptance do not mean that we should stand by silently or be intimidated into accepting the intolerable. Women cannot allow themselves to be manipulated into abandoning their dreams, nor should they forfeit their right and their power to be effective agents of social change. The world is in such a mess, it needs women's active commitment.

Women face a terrible irony, for just as they fight to gain an equitable place in society, many problems bring that very society dangerously close to the brink of collapse. Perhaps, rather than struggle to join the mainstream, women can foment a revolution that will transform local politics, patriarchal structures, and religious traditions. There are clearly discernible intersections between religion, politics, and women's lives. If women's goal is simply to gain an equal place in societies or religious institutions that are unjust, corrupt, and anachronistic, they run the risk of becoming disillusioned, as happened to many in the women's movement. Is our goal merely to find a safe place in patriarchal institutions that are crumbling or are we willing to take the risks necessary to transform these institutions?

As with all movements for social justice, Buddhist women face a "Catch 22" fraught with dangers. Some have the education, skills, and confidence to advocate changes on behalf of the disenfranchised. These women may see the structural changes that are necessary to correct injustices, yet the privileged cannot legitimately speak for all Buddhist women. Many Buddhists want to see changes in their traditions, especially concerning gender issues, but they also see much good in them. Despite its often hierarchical ordering, Buddhism represents an alternative to power politics and has a long tradition of shared decision making and openness to change. Yet as long as Buddhism has a gender problem of its own, it cannot become a genuine alternative to the status quo. Buddhism must be not only a spiritually liberating path for women, but a socially liberative path as well.

There are some 100,000 nuns in the world and only 20,000 have access to full ordination. This means that four qualified nuns in five are blocked from full membership in the monastic order. Each one of these nuns is like a candle capable of illuminating herself and others, but the light of many is being obstructed. The analogy to light is apt, symbolizing women's potential for enlightenment.

Women have been excluded from religious authority for a very long time—left out of the histories, given smaller portions, discounted, berated, and ignored. So why not work together to change things, reaching across perceived boundaries of race, class, culture, and ideology? Only rarely have women realized that they are out in the cold *together*. Together we represent a formidable force for change. The world today is a morass of greed, violence, hatred, corruption, economic exploitation, sexual slavery, torture, imprisonment, poverty, hunger, disease, and nuclear danger greater than ever before in human history. As women discover their own inner authority, they are working with wisdom and loving kindness to reconfigure social structures and address these ills.

Since 1987, Sakyadhita has worked to remind the Buddhist women of the world of their potential to correct social problems and create a world of peace and happiness for all living beings. We strongly believe in the value of awakening the world's 300 million Buddhist women to work for peace and social justice. Our work has been focused in Asia, especially among the poorest women. Sakyadhita's working principle has been to assist those in greatest need: women and children. We are convinced that educating women in disadvantaged segments of Buddhist society will act as a powerful catalyst for long-lasting and far-reaching change. Bringing our work to Taiwan, a prosperous Buddhist society with a strong tradition of social welfare, was extremely meaningful. Now we need to expand this enlightening transformation to every corner of the world

NOTES

1. These anthologies include *Buddhist Women and Social Justice: Ideals, Challenges, and Achievements*, Karma Lekshe Tsomo, ed. (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2004); *Innovative Women in Buddhism: Swimming Against the Stream*, Karma Lekshe Tsomo, ed. (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000); *Buddhist Women Across Cultures: Realizations*, Karma Lekshe Tsomo, ed. (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1999); *Buddhism Through American Women's Eyes*, Karma Lekshe Tsomo, ed. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Snow Lion Publications, 1994); and *Sakyadhita: Daughters of the Buddha*, Karma Lekshe Tsomo, ed. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Snow Lion Publications, 1989).

2. The countries most seriously affected have been Cambodia, China, Mongolia, Tibet, Vietnam, and various Buddhist Soviet republics.

3. See Ranjani de Silva, "Reclaiming the Robe: Reviving the Bhikkhuni Order in Sri Lanka," in Tsomo, *Buddhist Women and Social Justice*, pp. 124-25.

4. Ibid., pp. 119-35.

5. For example, see James William Coleman, *The New Buddhism: The Western Transformation of an Ancient Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Rick Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America* (Boston & London, Shambhala, 1992); David R. Loy, *A Buddhist History of the West: Studies in Lack* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2002); Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann, eds., *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Jeffrey Paine, *Re-Enchantment: Tibetan Buddhism Comes to the West* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2004); and Helen Tworokov, *Zen In America: Five Teachers and the Search for an American Buddhism* (New York: Kodansha International, 1994).







Buddhist Women Around the World





Thus Have I Heard: The Emerging Female Voice in Buddhism

Tenzin Palmo

The first meeting of Sakyadhita was held in 1987. Today, just 15 years later, we see that this initial gathering has evolved into the first organization specifically dedicated to the welfare of all Buddhist women in the entire 2500 years of Buddhist history. This extremely unique organization has been meeting regularly and has held seven world conferences. There have been many conferences in Buddhist history, but they were organized for monks. If women were lucky enough to attend at all, they had to sit in the back and be quiet, to absorb the wisdom of their “betters.” What Lekshe Tsomo and Sakyadhita have accomplished in the last 15 years is very unique in Buddhist history and we should appreciate that.

What has changed for women in the Buddhist world over these last 15 years? Obviously, great advances have taken place in the most conservative of Buddhist countries – Sri Lanka – with the full ordination of hundreds of nuns as *bhikṣuṇī*. I find this amazing. Once I heard His Holiness the Dalai Lama say that, if there were ever *bhikṣuṇī* in Sri Lanka, then there would definitely be *bhikṣuṇī* in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, too. When I reminded him of that recently, he just smiled and kept quiet. So we are still waiting, waiting...

In the fifth century CE, Sri Lankan *bhikṣuṇī* went to China to transmit the higher ordination to nuns, which completely transformed Chinese society for all women. Chinese women now had a choice. They did not have to marry. If they wanted, they could leave the household life and dedicate their lives to the spiritual path. Today, 1500 years later, Chinese *bhikṣuṇī* are returning the compliment and helping establish this flawless tradition again in Sri Lanka.

I was ordained as a *bhikṣuṇī* 30 years ago. At that time, people in the Tibetan tradition were beginning to think and talk about restoring the *bhikṣuṇī* lineage.

Now, 30 years later, they are still thinking and talking about it. Recently I had an audience with His Holiness the Dalai Lama and he immediately brought up the issue of *bhikṣuṇī* ordination for Tibetan nuns. He would like to see a meeting of the universal Saṅgha – the male Saṅgha, of course – from Thailand, Burma, Sri Lanka, China, Korea, and Saṅgha, to discuss this issue. His Holiness is the eternal optimist: All these *bhikṣus* will get together together and agree that, of course, they would love to have the *bhikṣuṇī* ordination in their countries. I said to His Holiness that, before the universal Saṅgha ever agrees on anything, it will be time for Buddha Maitreya to appear. In the meantime, what are we going to do?

Nuns from Korea, Taiwan, and Vietnam cannot completely understand the difficulties faced by nuns in less privileged societies, where nuns are truly looked down upon and regarded as inherently inferior. In India, I have a monastery of 24 nuns from Himalayan regions, such as Ladakh, Kinnaur, Nepal, and Tibet. Recently I asked them whether they felt that men were inherently more intelligent than women and they all said, “Yes, of course.” And I said, “You are wrong. It has been shown that when women and men receive equal opportunities for education, they do equally well. In fact, women often do better.”

His Holiness also mentioned that he has noticed that nowadays nuns from the Himalayan region and Tibet are much more devoted, diligent, and filled with enthusiasm for the Dharma than the monks. He said that he had great hopes for the future of nuns now that they are receiving education and training.

How sad it is that so many nuns in Buddhist countries believe that they are less capable than monks! This is what they are told. The monks in my monastery, all in good faith and with good feeling, also told me this. They said that, if nuns lead a good and virtuous life – “be good girls” – and pray very hard, then in our next life we can come back in a male body and really begin to practice. So many nuns and laywomen pray for a male body. And who can blame them, when women are so disadvantaged in society? In many Buddhist countries, nuns do not receive the kind of training that is just taken for granted by the monks. This is what we have to deal with now. The question is: How can we best educate the nuns and give them training in meditation, so that they can embody the Dharma completely and develop the confidence and sense of self-worth to become teachers for all of us?

This is already happening in some Buddhist countries. In Taiwan, some of the most prominent Saṅgha members are nuns. Why not? I am sure that the same is also true in Korea. We can clearly see that, in the West, where women and men have the same opportunities for education, many nuns and laywomen are emerging as Dharma teachers. Why should it be otherwise? Nuns and laywomen practice and study equally, and many become teachers and authors.

These days I talk with many women who are engaged in academic studies, including studies that trace the history of women in Buddhism. They publish books and people have begun to get an entirely different picture of women's roles within Buddhism.

The reason I wanted to discuss the emerging female voice in Buddhism is that, until very recently, there was no female voice. All the books were written by men. All the commentaries were written by men. People did not even realize that our whole knowledge of Buddhadharma was transmitted from a male point of view. The male point of view is perfectly valid, but it is only one point of view. There is also another way of approaching the Dharma. If the Buddha had been a female, some things would have been different, though not everything. The basic Dharma does not discriminate between male and female. We have all been born many times in a male body and many times in a female body. Sometimes I think that monks should remember that. Maybe next time they will come back in female bodies and experience what we feel.

How very sad that the main obstacles for women to be recognized in their own right and for the nuns in the Theravāda and Tibetan traditions to receive high ordination come from the Saṅgha itself. Many monks, though not all, are very supportive of nuns. But those in positions of authority seem to feel challenged or threatened. It must be fear. What else could it be? I sometimes wish that these monks could come to Taiwan and Korea and see how the two Saṅgha can live together in perfect harmony. The monks will not lose anything. What are they afraid of? The monks will benefit, because they will gain educated and dedicated sisters. What's the problem? Yet all of us who try to introduce higher ordination for women in our traditions run into either active opposition or, at least, procrastination. We are told, "In the future, in the future...." Why not now? There are many women in the world – half the world's population. As Lekshe Tsomo has pointed out, if women stand together and support women, we have tremendous power for good in the world.

The problem is that women often don't support women. Women often don't respect each other. If a monk and a nun are ordained at the same time, people will naturally respect the monk more, because he is male. In her heart, even the nun may respect the monk more. The laypeople support the Saṅgha through their donations, but if they only have a limited amount of food to offer, and a monk and a nun are standing in front of them, who will they donate to? It is rare that a woman will donate to the nun and tell the monk to go elsewhere. Often women themselves do not support women.

Many nuns do not respect each other. They generally look to men for their authority and, naturally, men will use this authority. So it is up to us. Buddhist women really must encourage and support each other. Nuns who come from privileged countries like Korea and Taiwan can help sisters who in need. Nuns

in less privileged countries need our support and our encouragement. They are in need of facilities for education and practice. Those who have so much should consider sharing a little with those who are less privileged.

It is quite extraordinary that, in the history of Buddhadharma, women are finally, finally finding a voice. Fifteen years from now, what will we have to report? Will the traditions still just be talking about full ordination for women? Or will it have become a reality? Will all the nuns still be wearing white or will they be clad in yellow? We hope for the best, but it depends on the nuns themselves. We cannot wait for the monks to make all the decisions for us, ever so slowly. We have to keep going forward, gently and carefully. Otherwise, if we wait for those now in positions of authority to make the decisions, we will be waiting until our next rebirth. Maybe even then, we will all come back as females and carry on the fight. Thank you!







Sakyadhita: Empowering the Daughters of the Buddha

Thea Mohr

The Buddha and Jesus are founders of world religions whose inspirations have lasted until today. A significant consequence of their teachings has been the empowerment and energizing of millions of women the world over. However, until recently, the roles of women were dictated by the patriarchal forms of organization that are common to religions in both Asia and the West. Women were confined to subordinate roles and had to be content with a minor share of power. Only in the twentieth century has this situation, which was almost universally accepted until then, undergone tremendous changes due to contemporary women's movements.

The Buddha taught the universality of suffering (*dukkha*) and the origin of suffering, as well as a systematic method and path to overcome suffering. He institutionalized his teachings in a community, the Saṅgha, which integrates women and men. Jesus accepted suffering and overcame it in the resurrection, in the love of his Father, whom he understood as his origin. Many women accompanied Jesus on his path.

Religious evolution has taken more than 2000 years to bring together the insights of Buddhist and Christian cultures, and to establish a forum for women which does justice to the religiously motivated and secular rights of women. The right to freedom, as the basis for activities in both traditions, is the centerpiece of new directions for women in Buddhism, toward self-determination, which can be understood as the keyword for a pattern of emancipation.

In the West, women's self-determination and consciousness has turned away from its sacred origins, though its beginnings are rooted in Christian thought. In traditional Asian Buddhist countries, women's claims to freedom seem to

be in accord with the concept of liberation in Buddhist thought. An innovative approach to the liberation of women, which calls for self-determination and guidelines for the liberation of women, draws on both traditions. Sakyadhita, the subject of this comparative study, is a forum for these attitudes.

Background Research on Sakyadhita International

In 1987, Buddhist nuns and laywomen from both Asia and the West met at a public conference in Bodhgaya to discuss their concerns and problems, and consider strategies to solve them. A record of the discussions held during this conference and subsequent international conferences is available in various publications.¹ These publications indicate the regional character of contemporary Buddhist women's developments. These developments and their significance have been mentioned in various publications.²

Michael von Brück and Whalen Lai explore Buddhist and Christian approaches to interreligious dialogue between these two world religions. They also consider the Buddhist women's movement at conferences which were held around the same time as the first Sakyadhita conference in Bodhgaya. The Third International Buddhist-Christian Dialogue Conference in Berkeley in 1987 dealt with three subjects: (1) the problem of identity; (2) the question of authority in religions, and (3) the growth and transmission of the classical religions under the conditions of pluralistic modernity. The organizers believe that this conference on Buddhist-Christian themes encouraged dialogue among Buddhist and Christian women.

In 1979, Diana Paul presented a study about the image of the female in Buddhism. This book, which was revised in 1985, presented an overview of stories and legends about the female in Mahāyāna Buddhism.³ Her research presents the ambivalence toward women that exists in Buddhism. On one hand, the Buddha accepted women as part of the Saṅgha, capable of leading a spiritual life in the same way as men. On the other hand, the order of monks remained dominant due to patriarchal patterns of organization.

Rita Gross, a noted phenomenologist of religion, considers these problems in her extensive studies, also mentioning the obvious ambivalence in Buddhism towards women. She offers three major points for discussion. First, in Buddhist literature the image of women and the social understanding of their roles are crucial. Woman is understood as a source of desire, but at the same time Buddhist texts seem to indicate that gender is not significant for spiritual liberation. Second, the development of Mahāyāna into Tantrayāna strengthens the recognition of equality, in contrast to other world religions. Third, the major Buddhist insights can only be united in a consistent way when women are granted full equality in Buddhist practice. Therefore, the realization of equality

is the core of Buddhist teachings and has to be established, even when it comes up against opposition from male members of the Saṅgha. In her conclusion, Gross calls for a spiritual and social reconstruction of Buddhism that takes into consideration modern feminist critiques.⁴

The debate on feminism and Buddhism among North American Buddhists started in the 1970s. Ruth Denison, Toni Packer, Joko Beck, and Joanna Macy were among the pioneers. The demand and support for the female voice led numerous American women to question: "Where are the lady *lamas*?"⁵ Sandy Boucher refers to this question in her anthology.⁶ Anne Carolyn Klein presents a study relating Buddhism, postmodernism, and feminism for an understanding of the self in these traditions, explaining mainly Tibetan Buddhism, and includes elements of philosophy and practice that are capable of linking Buddhism to contemporary feminist thought.⁷

As demonstrated by Brück and Lai, the main topics at the center of the debate in the Western feminist dialogue with Buddhism are identity, authority, and transmission.⁸ Since these topics can also be found in the discussions of Sakyadhita International, they are mentioned here.

First, Buddhism rejects an emphasis on individuality and asserts the dependent arising of all phenomena. Therefore, any tendency to stress the development of individuality is downplayed. This relates to Klein's opinions about holistic feminist approaches to communication processes. The exercise of religious authority, especially in the transmission of the Buddhist teachings, is contrary to the Buddhist teachings on no-self (*anātman*) in all appearances. The institution of the Saṅgha, however, belongs to this tradition.

What is required is a democracy in Buddhist groups that is consistent with the transmission of tradition. Since traditional Buddhists establish a relationship with their spiritual guides and teachers that presupposes a wholehearted subordination, and since Buddhist countries lack a method of hermeneutical (interpretative) textual criticism, conflicts arise for Western Buddhist women. These problems can be overcome, however. Since all views and relations are socially constructed and are not inherently given, religious truths are subject to change.

Accordingly, von Brück and Lai conclude that the dialogues between Buddhist and Christian women are at a very initial stage, although they have certainly begun. Of primary importance, Buddhist women in Asia and the West must initiate a process of self-clarification. Even though von Brück and Lai mention the Sakyadhita conferences, a systematic approach to their background and to the topics discussed in the talks and articles is missing. I have tried to unveil this background information in my publication. Here I would like to address these issues.

Method and Goal of the Present Research

My analysis of the materials presented during the Sakyadhita conferences reveals several important points. First, certain terms found in the records of the conferences can serve as points of reference for comparative religious studies. For example, the focus of these gatherings of Western and Asian women is the demand for freedom – freedom based on the achievements of both traditions. The term “self-determination consciousness” is a keyword that expresses this demand of freedom. This term can be further deconstructed and analyzed, dividing female self-responsibility into secular and sacral aspects. Secular self-determination consciousness characterizes Western Buddhists, whereas sacred self-determination consciousness marks the Buddhist traditions.

A question obviously arises: How is the difference between secular and sacral defined, and what is the boundary? To answer this question, a historical reconstruction is necessary. Western women’s liberation in the modern era is based on an extended process of detachment from an identity which has been fused with clerical Christian dictums. This historical process of establishing secular self-determination consciousness in the Western context has been analyzed in my study.

To understand the Buddhist process of establishing a sacral self-determination, a historical reconstruction is also necessary. In the process of outlining this historical reconstruction, I searched for a benchmark to compare religious experiences which is based on the source materials. The result of my inquiry is the keyword that I have just mentioned: self-determination consciousness.

My aim in this analysis was to prove certain hypotheses. An analysis of textual materials clearly illustrates different historical backgrounds that can serve as reference points for both Asian and Western women in the contemporary process of developing self-determination consciousness. This is what created the conditions for the foundation of Sakyadhita International. Buddhist women meeting in the forum of Sakyadhita International find a platform for communications, marking the start of a process of cross-fertilization of traditions. This process of cross-fertilization, in turn, permits a fresh reevaluation of traditions and a discarding of traditions that are found unnecessary or irrelevant. The cross-fertilization process, initiated by forums in the Buddhist women’s movement has inspired innovations among Buddhist women in both Asia and the West which are affecting the Buddhist tradition as a whole. As a new millennium begins, Sakyadhita International is a vibrant participant in the establishment of a global Buddhism.

Mode of Analysis

For the above hypothesis to be verified, it is necessary to demonstrate that Western women have developed a secular self-determination consciousness. In the West, the study of women's history presumes that the establishment of social structures coincides with a patriarchal distribution of power, found in early forms of society.⁹ The most striking feature of these structures is that women are required to accept the male insistence on their subordination and submission. They are required to leave the institutional aspects of religion to men and function exclusively as servants. These supportive tasks nevertheless serve as a source of energy for women.¹⁰

In the West, however, a feminist consciousness developed in opposition to canonical texts. For example, an Old Testament passage (Genesis 3:17) has been used to claim that all misery in the world resulted from due to Eve's seduction. The Greek Antigue tells the myth of Pandora, who opened the box and released all human miseries. The New Testament has St. Paul declaring that women have to keep silent in church. In contrast, Hildegard of Bingen and Christine de Pizan serve as good examples of protagonist attitudes. The importance of the two authors lies in the fact that, inspired by these personalities, women began to consciously raise their voices. In the case of Hildegard, this was only possible within the framework of the Catholic Church, since she received her education and accessed the Christian doctrines there. Her demand for freedom was anchored in Christian beliefs and therefore sacrally motivated. Her lines of thinking have continued in the same stream as Christian mystics and modern Christian feminists. Hildegard of Bingen is important because she expressed a high degree of detachment from the male authority in Christianity and displayed great creativity in her thoughts and visions. Her liberal self-expression in the struggle for female identity can be considered a starting point in the dynamic movement for self-determination consciousness and constructs a pattern of emancipation.

Hildegard's efforts can be seen as leading directly to the work of the renaissance author Christine de Pizan. Her novel, *The Book of the City of Women*,¹¹ reflects total self-detachment of the Christian kind – a determination that leads to the emancipation of women on a secular level. As an author, de Pizan played a role in society on her own strength and was able to support herself with an independent income. She participated in public discussions about understandings of women at that time and showed resistance toward conventional views. In this manner, she was able to achieve sufficient prominence to be heard outside clerical institutions.

Feminists who came after Hildegard could refer to de Pizan's radical insistence on a female self-image to take the Western women's emancipation movement into the modern era. Examples are Olympe de Gouges,¹² who lived during the French revolution, and later activists for women's rights who lived during the industrial revolution.¹³ From the beginning until now, the inner strength of emancipated women demanded an acceptance of women as fully human participants in political and public life.

The trends of thought that contributed to the feminist theories of the women's liberation movement also led to the emergence of self-determined consciousness in the West. In my study, on the basis of limited examples, I came to the conclusion that secular self-determination, which demands political rights in public institutions, is an indispensable contribution of the West. This secular self-determination, which is consciously or subconsciously present in all Western women, is also presumably present in Western women who contribute to the Sakyadhita International conferences. Therefore, when meeting in an international Buddhist forum, based on their historical background and the secular value of self-determination, Western women are confronted, with the following questions.

First, the women's movement in the West is centered around a particular definition of female identity, one that attempts to overcome patriarchal power structures in public life. At the same time, there is clearly a modern tendency toward a destruction of the personality. The traditional anchoring in a personal transcendence, which may be centered around a Christian father God, seems to be invalid. The question being asked is: What else can serve as a source or foundation for a basic sense of self or personality?

Second, some women in the West seem to have found an answer in Buddhism, particularly in the concepts of no-self (*anātman*) and emptiness (*śūnyatā*). These Buddhist concepts can be considered crucial for developing a religiously motivated self-determination. For Western women, the religiously motivated aspect of self-determination is sometimes seen as having been lost during the process of detachment from Christian doctrines. However, the concept of secular self-determination can help women visualize new dimensions. When conjoined with Buddhist thought, this secular self-determination can lead to further development and, in the process, help overcome the limitations of the secular view. While Western women might turn to the Buddhist tradition in search of an alternative source of identity, they carry their questions and analysis to Buddhism, exploring possible solutions presented and developed by Buddhism.

Third, although Western women took the initiative and interest to develop a Buddhist women's movement, their secularly grounded self-determination may, in the process, become enlarged by the sacral elements of the Buddhist

tradition. As a consequence, their present self-determination will be transformed.

The Buddhist doctrine has developed a religious self-determination consciousness that is based on the concepts of no-self (*anātman*) and emptiness (*śūnyatā*). Like Christianity, Buddhism developed within a framework of patriarchal structures. The Buddha initiated a number of reforms. Among them, he founded what is generally regarded as the first order of nuns in history.¹⁴ He thereby provided women in India with an alternative to existence as a housewife, mother, or daughter in permanent dependence on male family members.

Women who are members of Buddhist orders live in accordance with the Buddhist philosophical doctrines based on the central concepts of no-self (*anātman*) and emptiness (*śūnyatā*), the total abandonment of suffering, without any contradictory attitudes towards male dominance. For Western women, an understanding of Buddhism's historical background that leads to a religiously motivated self-determination consciousness seems to be of great interest.

Asian women who are Buddhists by birth generally have access to the teachings of the Buddha. However, the details of the teachings seem to be difficult to study, because the administration of Buddhist knowledge and teachings is in the hands of androcratic/male authorities in many institutions of the tradition. Recently, traditionally Buddhist women have begun to demand the transmission of Buddhist teachings – a demand that is in accord with the statements of the founder of the religious tradition itself. In order to obtain proper access to the contents and meaning of the teachings, Asian Buddhist women might make use of the achievements of the West. The successful resistance of Western women to patriarchal infringement and androcratic exertion of power may provide inspiration for Asian women to succeed in their demands for the transmission of teachings.

Sakyadhita serves as a forum for the unveiling of the points of intersection between secular and sacral self-determination consciousness. To clearly define the points of intersection between Western feminism and traditional Buddhism, various aspects of the Sakyadhita conferences need to be considered.

First, the Western feminist movement seeks to enrich the historically developed secular self-determination approach. In this, the Asian religiously-motivated self-determination approach can play a supportive role. Second, Asian Buddhists seek to expand their traditional religiously-motivated self-determination by adopting organizational strategies to reduce male dominance in administering the teachings and to facilitate increased acceptance of the legitimate demands of traditional Buddhists.

The mutual questioning and analysis of each other's traditions finds a common meeting ground in the forums of Sakyadhita International. This process of mutual inquiry includes a recognition that Western institutions, private and public, are moving away from patriarchal dominance. This development is evident in women's opposition to sexual exploitation and abuse, in their exercise of greater power and authority, and in both their subtle and open demands for an end to oppression. The presence of alternative religions in the West reflects and engenders an understanding that life choices need not be controlled by men. This understanding points to freedom from male hierarchies and male interpretations of the teachings. Consequently, the fresh acquisition of an ancient tradition gives rise to new opportunities to expand the Western feminist movement with newly understood sacral elements.

The encounter with Buddhism touches upon and influences the following elements of the sacral self-determination consciousness, forming a pattern of emancipation:

1. Techniques of meditation. These include training in mindfulness, concentration, and insight into the causes of suffering.

2. Psychological theories. In an attempt to understand the self and develop self esteem and self-evaluation, not as denigrating or pathological, but as a way to overcome hurts and suppressed desires, allowing them to rise to consciousness, which is experienced as liberating. Accordingly, new insights can open up, which may lead to a new form of life acceptance.

3. Philosophical insights. Buddhist teachings are based on the opinion that the true nature of the mind is not limited by belonging to a particular category, such as gender, but is empty of limiting attributes. Therefore, a liberated mind is capable of constant new understanding. Biological conditioning as "male" or "female" is understood as limiting. Such conditioning can be overcome through mental development, for example, in discovering androgyny, developing spiritually, and/or understanding embodiedness but transcending it at the same time.¹⁵

With these possibilities, by gaining access to new dimensions of transcendence through the Buddhist teachings, women do not need measures of sanction. The teachings deliver a mental freedom that is important for transforming traditional patterns of self-determination consciousness into patterns of emancipation in the future. A certain emphasis on lay Buddhist practice is already present in the West and a conjoining of worldly and spiritual activities can already be found in mixed-gender Buddhist centers. The absorption of Buddhist elements into the secular self-determination consciousness becomes a pattern of emancipation that can be helpful for achieving personal integration. It can lead to both a new interpretation of Buddhism that does not

forfeit the foundations of the Buddhist teachings and question the traditional dominant roles of men in the transmission of the teachings.

In contrast, in Asia a religiously-motivated self-determination consciousness can be found. For the past 2,500 years, born Buddhists have known the illusory nature of all appearances and phenomena, and can ground themselves in the liberative techniques which the Buddha taught: meditative practice, psychology, and philosophy. However, the Buddhist teachings are administered patriarchally, by male dominated institutions, which automatically imposes restrictions on women

In order to obtain free access to these institutions, the religious self-determination pattern of emancipation could usefully borrow the following from the achievements of the feminist movement in the West:

1. Compulsory general education and access to university studies, resulting in greater independence.
2. Access to new professional fields (as organizers, translators, administrators, Dharma teachers, etc.) to stabilize their source of livelihood and economic independence.
3. Movement away from women being only donors of alms, the traditional function of laywomen.
4. Movement away from nuns only providing services to monks (especially meal preparation and financial administration, since monks are not allowed to touch money).

For traditional female Buddhists, the revival of the nuns' order established by the Buddha is important as a basic human right.¹⁶ While Asian women previously fulfilled the expectation of traditional female identity, Sakyadhita International provides a new forum to develop new interpretations of the institutions the Buddha founded 2,500 years ago, institutions which historically have been difficult to maintain due to the structures of society. Internationally, a large number of monks have already accepted the demand for women's self-determination. For example, the reestablishment of the nuns' order in Sri Lanka was achieved with the help of monks.

Points of Intersection Promote Innovation

To evolve to a point of intersection between secular and religious self-determination is to recognize the stark contrast between traditional Buddhism as a religion of birth, with its dependence on family and autocratic traditions, and the emerging Buddhism in the West, where followers make private, personal decisions that are capable of being reversed. Western Buddhists take the responsibility to select a religion of their choice, whereas traditional Buddhists inherit their religion by birth.

Sakyadhita International provides opportunities for communication and encourages Buddhist women's development. Through its strategic initiatives, today women in both Asia and the West have gained a fresh understanding of and approach to Buddhism. In these ways, Sakyadhita has stimulated and continues to contribute to the global process of women's activities. The developments mentioned above will have a major impact on both Buddhist women and the future of Buddhism itself. It is likely that the cross-cultural effects of this synergy will soon be evident and new forms of an Asian/Western religiosity will arise that will perhaps inspire discussions of gender democracy in the future.

Constituents of Self-determination in Asia and the West

Female Identity. Since the dawn of history, philosophical and theological thinking has centered around questions of identity. Sociologists and psychologists have included these questions in their field of inquiry and enlarged them into explorations of social identity, group identity, personal identity, and ego/self-identity.

With the evolution of social identities and the delineation of role patterns for individuals, questions of integrity arise, leading them to articulate differentiated and fundamental self-identities. Issues of identity are linked with questions about the meaning of life, such as: Who am I? Where do I belong? How can I live harmoniously with others? How is my life defined in relationship to others? Identity can be understood as a mutual interplay between the individual and society. It therefore includes questions of human rights and humanity.

Modern sociologists are of the opinion that the most effective strategy is to develop a personality that is relatively independent from the expectations of class and society.¹⁷ Such an identity is better equipped to overcome personal crises, such as a decline in social status, the loss of a loved one, professional setbacks, and so forth. With particular reference to issues of female identity, role patterns have changed conspicuously in the last few decades.

Overall, the history of consciousness can be considered a history of male consciousness, based on the inbuilt assumption that male consciousness represents all of general human consciousness. Modern research now acknowledges that the history of female self-understanding is still in its early stages. Philosophically the question of female identity involves multiple dimensions. An abstract framework for defining female identity includes descriptions of the following three relations:

- From outside to inside, i.e., the relations between society and the individual.
- From inside to inside, i.e. the field in which personal identity is

constructed. This can be compared with an inner conversation or introspection. A person must leave this position and transcend it, so as not to remain in monologue. This, in turn, leads to the next relation.

- From inside to outside/above, i.e., the transcending of an individual's present identity to higher levels. This process is not necessarily founded on religious impulses, but can be motivated religiously.

For Western women, these constellations of relations can become self-conflicting. The first dimension demands patriarchal submission. The third dimension is characterized by male visions of the divine or Father God. Accordingly the second dimension, a personal self-image, is difficult to realize.

During my inquiry, these three elements of self-determination became points of reference, guiding the historical reconstruction of female identity. A further differentiation of self-determination into secular and sacral elements becomes necessary.

Secular Self-determination. The term “secular” denotes a process of a detachment from the human, social, and political order, typically as related to Christian doctrines. The European Reformation as well as the Italian Renaissance can be considered important steps in the process of secularization. The emancipation of the individual from the Christian Church establishes the self-reliant nature of every person, which is clearly a basis for women's identity formation, too. The discovery of consciousness in philosophy was defined as self-consciousness. Since Rene Descartes, truth has been grounded in reflections of the self. Hegel understood self-consciousness as identical with truth.

It can be concluded that in the secular sphere identity formation is related to individual consciousness, which does not require a clerical reference or a religious motivation, but instead bases itself on the responsibility of human beings to give meaning to their individual lives. The process of self-reliance for conscious actions is synonymous with self-determination. This emphasis of the Western women's movement is elaborated in my study. I mention that the first and second elements are present to a high degree, but the third element is lacking, which leads to an inquiry into new forms of transcendence.

Emptiness (*śūnyatā*). In Buddhism the term *śūnyatā* is central and well known to Buddhist scholars. The importance of this term for my inquiry is that the phenomenon “woman” or “female” is a phenomenon like any other, that is, empty of a self or inherent identity. On the level of conventional truth it can be stated that there is a particular form that is called “woman.” From the viewpoint of ultimate truth, the elements of the body are conventionally and temporarily existent, but contain no inherent womanhood in themselves. The term “woman” exists only in dependence on various constituent parts.

On one hand, Buddhism views impermanence and the ability to change as freedom, since womanhood is only a temporary condition and a linguistic convention. On the other hand, this temporary existence is characterized by suffering, due to the natural tendency of human beings to attach themselves to the constituents of the phenomenon of womanhood.

Sacral Self-determination. The Sanskrit term for religion is Dharma. Buddhism understands Dharma as the teachings and the path to freedom from suffering, the inescapable condition of ordinary life. The process of achieving liberation, the soteriology of the Buddhist teachings, aims to decrease suffering by eliminating the factors that cause it. The aim of the Buddhist teachings is to find antidotes to the causes of suffering, which are defined in the Eightfold Noble Path that the Buddha taught. The existential realization of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) is synonymous with liberation.

Accordingly, sacral self-determination in Buddhism is closely connected to the term *śūnyatā*. Regarding the elements of self-determination, Buddhist women can relate to the third dimension of transcendence without the intervention of male connotations. However, the first relation – from outside to inside – is still lacking, because Buddhist institutions are dominated by male authorities.

In sum, self-determination, composed of three relations, can be illustrated as follows:

West		East
+	from outside to inside	-
+	from inside to inside	+
-	from inside to above	+
secular		sacral

The meeting of women from Asia and the West at various Sakyadhita conferences is a starting position for change. Inquiry into the historical background of both traditions and writings from the conferences show that dynamics have been initiated that are fruitfully compensating for deficiencies on both sides. Due to their different cultural backgrounds, women in Asia and the West understand Buddhism in different ways. Sakyadhita International is challenged to form an alliance between (1) women from Western cultural backgrounds and without institutional power who can reevaluate the Buddhist teachings, and (2) women from traditional Buddhist backgrounds who are challenged to transmit the teachings to new Buddhists who value Buddhist meditation, psychology, and philosophy.

The Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women may influence the future history of religion. The conferences are part of a global women's movement that is inspiring discussions of gender democracy in both Asia and the West. The more Buddhist theories of cognition and values of tolerance and universal responsibility become rooted in the West, and the more West values of material self-sufficiency and free access to education become rooted in Buddhist institutions, the more fruitful cross-cultural exchange will be. Women can contribute by emphasizing a spirituality that is beyond religions and the Sakyadhita conferences can contribute by helping women overcome gender limitations. As Buddhist women's identity formation and self-determination are fully understood, submissiveness and dominance will no longer be the basis for secular and sacral self-determination and gender democracy will naturally emerge.

NOTES

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Buddhist Women of Bhutan

Tenzin Dadon (Sonam Wangmo)

In Bhutan, there are quite a number of nunneries and there are approximately 40 to 50 nuns in each nunnery. Two nunneries operate under the auspices of the government of Bhutan and the rest are privately run, that is, they are supported by donations offered by the local people. As a whole, the nuns do not get an opportunity to study like the monks do, but the nuns do learn to read, so they can memorize prayers and recite the scriptures for the benefit of the sick and the deceased, and also to clear away obstacles. When the people offer money for special *pūjās* (religious services), the money is kept by the nunnery to be used for food and other necessities for the community. When the nuns are invited to individual houses to do prayers, they receive monetary offerings that they can use for their own pocket money. The nuns only know how to read and some know how to write, but none of them understands the meaning of the texts which are necessary for the practice of Buddhism.

The nuns in the two nunneries recognized by the government get Rs. 200 per month for food and other necessities, whether it is sufficient or not. The nuns have to manage their food on their own and build their own houses. The nunneries are built very far away from the road, so the nuns have to walk for an hour or two and sometimes even for a day to reach their nunneries. The nuns have no intensive study program.

A typical day at a nunnery in Bhutan begins at four in the morning and continues until nine at night. Most nuns get up at four and start memorizing the prayers used for the *pūjās*. Then they gather for the morning prayers at 6

to 7.30 am. After a one-hour break for breakfast, they again gather until 12 o'clock noon with just a short break in-between. Again, after a one-hour lunch break, they start to practice the religious musical instruments and the ritual aspects until 3 pm. They then do prayers until 9 pm, after which they go to their own rooms and prepare dinner. Most of the nuns do not eat lunch, since they do not have much time to prepare a meal. Instead, they drink tea and eat some snacks with it. During the sacred months and on special days, they practice the fasting ritual (*nyungne*) and recite the mantras of the different deities. These practices may last for a month or even longer.

These days most nuns understand the importance of education and many come to India to study Buddhist philosophy. I am one among the nuns who are studying in India. I have been studying philosophy at Jamjang Chöling Institute since August 1993



Buddhist Laywomen of Nepal

Nivedita Kumari Mishra

Buddhist thought highlights the moral character of both men and women, but in both practical and religious terms, societies revolve around women. Women play important roles in the development and preservation of social and religious values. Numerous stories in the *Jatakas* and *Avadanas* reveal the contributions of women, encouraging Buddhist ideas among more and more people.

Women in Nepal have been involved in the preservation and development of Buddhism since the Licchavi era, a royal dynasty that existed from 300 to 800 CE. The historical and religious vicissitudes of this era are mentioned in the ancient scriptures, but are not relevant to the present political map of Nepal. Historically, until the seventeenth century the Kathmandu Valley was known as Nepal. After that time all the kingdoms near and far from the Kathmandu Valley as far as the Indian and Chinese borders were unified and given the name Nepal by His Majesty Prithavi Narayan Shah. Evidence from inscriptions presents vivid descriptions of cultural, social, and religious events in the valley of Nepal. Henceforth the word Nepal will signify only the Kathmandu Valley.

Early Traces of Buddhism in Nepal

On the basis of inscriptional and epigraphic evidence, the history of the valley dates back to the fifth century CE.¹ Yet various scholars have come to the conclusion that Buddhism entered the Kathmandu Valley well before the fourth century CE.² Evidence from inscriptions dating to the Licchavi era reveal that Mahāyāna Buddhism was in vogue in the valley during this period.³

The early (mostly Mahāyāna) Buddhist scriptures known as the Nava Granthas,⁴ which are kept and cared for with full respect from generation to

generation in the Newar Buddhist community, are all composed in Sanskrit, the dominant medium of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Mention of these scriptures in the inscriptions of the Licchavi era⁵ confirm that Mahāyāna Buddhism entered the valley at an early time. Mahāyāna, along with the Vajrayāna branch of Mahāyāna, continued to flourish and expand in the twelfth century, at a time when the Vajrayāna tradition had spread throughout the valley in the form of *tantra*. Vajrayāna was not unknown even during the Licchavi period.⁶

There is evidence of women's involvement in Buddhist practice in the Kathmandu Valley during this period, too.⁷ Not only was the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha in existence, but inscriptions also indicate that laywomen were similarly active in the propagation and preservation of Buddhism during the Licchavi period, supporting the Saṅgha through donations and accumulating merit for the prosperity of their family members and all creatures of the world.⁸ In categorizing the members of the Saṅgha, it is pointed out that *upāsakas* and *upāsikās* are men and women who combine their practice of the Dharma teachings with householder responsibilities.⁹ Princess Bhrikuti, a laywoman, was a prominent figure of ancient Nepal whose valuable contributions to the understanding and propagation of Buddhism cannot be forgotten. She was married to Srong btsan sgam po, the king of Tibet. Mahāyāna Buddhism was widespread during the Licchavi era and Princess Bhrikuti Devi's father was said to possess a highly blessed images of Akshobhya Buddha, a Maitreya Buddha turning the wheel of Dharma, and a sandalwood Tr. Bhrikuti Devi was very fond of those images and used to venerate them with great sincerity. Even after her marriage was arranged, she could not part with them,¹⁰ so she took these priceless Buddhist images as part of her dowry when she went to Tibet. There she propagated Buddhism in an early Vajrayāna form. Through meritorious deeds, such as temple construction, she wholeheartedly earned the name of white Tārā.¹¹

Inscriptions found in the valley and external historical evidence, such as mention in Tibetan histories, confirm a gradual development from early Buddhism to later Buddhism, namely Vajrayāna, inside the valley. In due course, Mahāyāna in its Vajrayāna form gained a strong footing there and has continued to thrive until the present day.

Newar Buddhist Society

Along with men, women practiced the moral precepts and followed the doctrinal themes of Mahāyāna through various rites and rituals in Newar Buddhist society in Nepal. In Newar society, people mainly follow either Buddhism or Hinduism. Buddhist Newar society consists of two wings: the Upsaka and the Bare (Buddhist practitioners). The Bare class is highly revered

in the Newar Buddhist community. The Vajrācārya and Śākya are the two prominent groups who are considered the spiritual guides of the laypeople. They are also called Gubhaju (meaning “guru” or “teacher”) by lay Buddhists of this community.

Vajrācāryas are married Buddhist practitioners. The word “Vajrācārya” signifies that their religious status is related to the rituals and philosophy of Vajrayāna. Vajrācāryas who have received initiation as Vajra masters can act as priests for the Buddhist laity. The Vajrācāryas’ primary identity is as a tantric priest and getting married is essential for them.¹²

Śākyas are another almost equally respected group in Newar society. There is not much difference between Śākyas and Vajrācāryas, except that the *ācārya* initiation of a Vajra master is especially given to Vajrācāryas. Śākyas can receive this initiation on their own, but they cannot be recognized as priests.

Whether Hindu or Buddhist, Newars are mostly confined to the Kathmandu Valley. There are Buddhist communities in Nepal other than the Newars, but in this paper I focus on the observances followed by Newar Buddhist women. Buddhism in Nepal is largely association with the Buddhism of Newar society.

Mahāyāna Buddhism advocates the ideal of the bodhisattva who embodies the highest state of wisdom and compassion, and has eliminated all sexual and social discriminations. Every being, whether male or female, ordained or lay, is considered a potential Buddha.¹³ Every sentient being thus possesses Buddha nature. In the *Saddharmapundarika Sūtra*, Buddha nature is termed “*prabhaswor*,” which means “shining light.” Shining light or clear light is self-cognizant. It has no form and is the Dharmakaya, which is the mind aspect of the Buddha. The concept of *śūnyatā prabhaswor* is fully discussed in the *Tathāgatagarbha*, a Madhyamika text.¹⁴

The meaning of “clear light” is the self-cognizant and unfabricated original or primordial wakefulness which is present in the mind of sentient beings of the three realms.¹⁵ This theme is reflected in the verses regarding *upāya kausala parivarta* in the *Saddharmapundarika Sūtra*. In this text, the Buddha says he wishes that all the sentient beings may acquire all the 32 special marks and become self-cognizant knowers of the true nature of the world, and self-originated.¹⁶ Mahāyāna thus emphasizes the theme that any being who follows the moral precepts and does meritorious deeds can achieve Buddhahood, since all creature possess Buddha nature. Since Vajrayāna is clearly a branch of Mahāyāna, it also incorporates the notion that every individual processes Buddha nature.

Since Newar Buddhism is predominately Vajrayāna Buddhism, and Buddhist women’s religious performances and observances are ritualized forms of Vajrayāna *tantra*, the basic tenets of this tradition need to be elucidated

here. Because Vajrayāna is a branch of Mahāyāna, it incorporates its basic philosophy. *Pāramitānaya* (the *pāramitā* path) and *mantra naya* (the *mantra* path) are the two subdivisions of Mahāyāna Buddhism. The practice of the first five perfections lead to the supreme perfection, *prajñāpāramitā* (“perfect knowledge”), which is the ultimate goal of *pāramitānaya*. Attaining ultimate truth through the practice of sacred *mantras* (recitations), *mudrās* (seal gestures), and yogic practices (meditation) are the methods of *mantra naya*. The *pāramitānaya* method takes an undetermined length of time to attain Buddhahood, whereas the *mantra naya* is a quicker method by which *nirvāṇa* can be achieved even in one lifetime. The *mantra naya* is accessible only to people of high caliber, however. *Pāramitānaya* as cause and *mantra naya* as effect can be practiced together for attaining emancipation in the Vajrayāna.¹⁷

The term Vajrayāna and the philosophy revealed by this system is defined in various tantric works. The word *vajra* is defined in the *Advayaavajrasangraha* as “*dradhm sar adahi avinasi ca śūnyatām vajram uccate*.”¹⁸ The *Jñānasiddhi* says “*Bodhicittani bhaved vajram*” and *bodhicitta* is defined in the Hevajratantra as “*śūnyatā karuṇa dvya swabham bodhi cittam*.” Thus *vajra*, voidness, and *bodhicitta* can be regarded as synonyms. Furthermore *citta* comprises voidness and compassion and this linkage establishes the theory that along with the *śūnyatā* doctrine, the thought of universal compassion is also adopted in tantric Buddhism. However, compassion for all beings was not new to tantric Buddhism; early Buddhist treatises are full of the thought of liberating all creatures in the world and this is not only the task of the *bodhisattvas*.¹⁹

Buddhism in Nepal, especially in Newar society, is lived through tantric Buddhist rituals. The spiritual leaders and followers both engage in religious observances. The seeds of rites and rituals sown by the Mahāsaṅghika monks were further nourished by tantric Buddhists. By the time Xuanzang visited at Amravati in 639 CE, the place had developed from a Mahāsaṅghika community to a flourishing Mahāyāna center, and ritualistic worship had become part and parcel of monastic life.²⁰ A multiplicity of Buddhas and bodhisattvas had already been introduced early in the Mahāyānic period.²¹ In the Vajrayāna scriptures, five Dhyāni Buddhas along with their consorts and families of subordinate deities were introduced. The five Dhyāni Buddha are manifestations of Lord Buddha. While seated in different *samādhis*, the Buddha recited different *mantras* and transformed himself into Tathgatas in various forms, which he placed as his replicas in different parts of the *mandala*.²² In another Buddhist tantric scripture, the five Dhyāni Buddhas represent the five *skandhas* or aggregates of which phenomena are composed.²³ These Dhyāni Buddhas are regarded as the progenitors of the different families of Buddhist meditational deities, male and female.²⁴

The deities found in Buddhist tantra cannot be compared with Hindu gods and goddesses. They are not mere idols. The process of evolution of the deities is described in tantric works. The deities are connected, as all students of tantra know, with the *sādhana* and *siddhi*, and the concept of godhead is essentially a spiritual or psychic matter. The process of evolution of the deity as described in tantric works clearly explains the origin of the deities and their gradual evolution from seed syllables. For instance, the *Advayavajra sangrah* says: “The form of the deity is an explosion of *śūnyatā*. It is by nature empty; whenever there is an explosion, the essence is surely *śūnya*.”

Another verse says, “From right perception of *śūnyatā* proceeds the seed syllable, from the seed syllable proceeds the conception of an icon, and from the icon its external representations.” The whole process therefore is one of dependent arising.²⁵ Since laypeople could not observe the secret and profound yogic practices (*sādhana*), a ritualization of these yogic processes is introduced that will gradually take them toward emancipation. So the Vajrayāna is categorized into four: Kriya (ritual), Carya (practicing the bodhisattva vows), Yoga (visualization through meditation), and Anuttara (transcendental concentration in which body, speech, and mind are unified).

Newar Buddhism is mostly attached to Kriya and Carya aspects of Vajrayāna Buddhism. Most of the rites performed during Buddhist tantric rituals present lucid explanations of Buddhist philosophy. The performer of rituals generally belongs to the Upsaka (follower) class. People of this class have faith in Buddhism but are more inclined to rituals as a means to overcome ignorance and the karmic effects of their nonvirtuous actions. Carya, the practice of Buddhist philosophy in day-to-day life, is similar. The word “*carya*” is derived from the root “*car*,” which denotes the course proceeding behavior and conduct.²⁶

The arduous vows and observances that were promulgated by Buddhas and bodhisattvas are exercised by Buddhist practitioners, especially by women in Kathmandu. The definition of *carya* is presented as the performance of, with the permission of teacher (Buddhas), arduous vows through various observances.

A number of rituals related to Buddhist deities are performed by laywomen and the wives of Vajrācārya and Śākya under the guidance of a priest. They offer *pūjā* to particular tantric deities and follow the moral precepts prescribed in Buddhist scriptures. The observances are called *vrata* in the Newar Buddhist community.²⁷ The observances which are more frequently followed by Buddhist women are Astamivrata, Vasundharavrata, and Taravrata.

Astamivrata. On the eighth day of each lunar fortnight, known as Astamivrata, Newar Buddhist women offer devotion to Amoghpaśalokeswor, a multi-armed form of Avalokitesvara that was introduced in the valley in the late middle ages. The name of the deity means “Avalokitesvara with the unerring

noose.” Newar Buddhists observe these days for worldly purposes, such as to ward off evil, achieve good qualities, obtain good looks, gain release from prison, relieve great distress, or beget offspring. As stated in the *Sadharma Pundarika* (*Samant mukhparivarta*): “Whosoever shows reverence to Avalokiteswor to get a son will have a son full of good qualities and good looking, too.”²⁸

Vasundharavrata. This *varta* is performed on the third day of dark fortnight of the month of Aswin (October). As a member of Ratnasambhava family, Vasundhara has all the characteristics of Ratnasambhava Tathagata. Ratnasambhava means “one who is born of the jewel.” In Buddhism, the jewel represents *bodhicitta*, the union of compassion and wisdom. So Vasundhara also embodies both wisdom and compassion. In particular, The particular wisdom of equality that Vasundhara embodies means that each and every sentient being equally wants to be happy and free from suffering. Vasundhara is the personification of the purified form of the feeling aggregate. She becomes the symbol of the earth for whom every person and every thing is equal, so the Newars worship her for prosperity or wealth.

Aryataravrata. The *varta* of Aryatara is observed on the first day of the bright fortnight of every month. Tārā is said to embody the *prajñā* of Buddha Amonghsiddhi. As a embodiment of the air element, she is green in color. She is also called Irsyarati, meaning the nature of jealousy, because when the defilement of jealousy is transmuted it becomes all-accomplishing wisdom (*kriyanusthana jñāna*). She belongs to the Karma family and represents the enlightend activity of the Buddhas of the three times. She has many forms, appearing with six arms, eight arms, and so on.²⁹ Tārā *vrata* is observed in Newar Buddhism for longevity. It is not yet well established when the Tārā *vrata* began, but the procedures described in handbooks of Tārā worship are very similar to the *sādhana* of visualizing Tārā that is prescribed in the *Sādhanamala*.³⁰

The Common Features of these Observances

The arrangements for the *pūjā* process are organized either by a group of people or by an individual lay Buddhist. Sometimes the priests also organize group observances related to a particular deity at specific sacred sites. Every observance has to be performed on special days of the month.

The participants, mostly middle-aged women, observe eight precepts (*śīla*). The precepts are: (1) not to take life, (2) not to steal, (3) not to commit sexual misconduct, (4) not to tell lies, (5) not to intoxicate oneself, (6) not to eat at the wrong time, (7) not to watch dancing, singing, or musical performances, (8) not to wear perfumes and finery, and (9) not to sleep on high beds. These eight precepts are termed *uposadha* in the Newar Buddhist community. In

addition to the eight precepts, there are other abstinences, such as not to eat salt, non-vegetarian food, or fruits with one seed (such as mango and a kind of myrobalan). The women take only one meal on the day of observances, but not necessarily before midday. It should be noted that the Vajrayāna adherents recognize the existence of different classes among the worshipers, beginning with the strict observance of the Vinaya rules in the lowest rank (*kriya tantra*) to the stage of no restriction in the highest rank (*anuttaratantra*),”³¹ so it is clear that Newar Buddhism is influenced by the Vajrayāna way of thinking in this connection. The *Advyaavajra* classifies Buddhist as *śaikṣas* and *aśaikṣas*, and prescribes strict rules for *śaikṣas*, who are regarded as less advanced in matters of spiritual progress.³²

In almost in every *vrata*, the priest (the guru or Vajrācārya) performs the preliminary rites, such as the Gurumandala *pūjā*.³³ This rite is performed before every *pūjā* to purify the priest and the participants. In Vajrayāna practice, the role of the guru is very important. Success in following either Sūtrayāna or Tantrayāna depends solely on guru devotion. The *Gurupancasika*, written by Asvaghosa in the first century BCE, first mentions guru devotion and establishes the view that in Tantrayāna no one can achieve Buddhahood without the help of the guru, for the guru is the Buddha.³⁴ During the process of the Gurumandala *pūjā*, the tantric deity Vajrasattva is worshiped, as he is considered the guru of the gurus (Vajrācāryas). Vajrasattva has both father and mother aspects. His hundred-syllable mantra is very efficacious in purifying defilements through confession practice.³⁵ Worshiping Vajrasattva through the Gurumandala *pūjā* is a ritual way to purify both the guru (the priest) and the participants. The Gurumandala *pūjā* is done on a site diagram in which the entire world is symbolized by Mt. Meru, the continents, and all the wealth and glory of all the beings in the universe. The performer of the *pūjā* offers the mandala to the deity.

Offering the entire world to the deity may be interpreted in various ways. Primarily it represents the notion of non-attachment, which is a basic requirement for achieving *nirvāṇa*. Another interpretation is the compassionate attitude that motivates the offerer to give up all belongings including himself or herself for the welfare of worldly beings. The mandala is the symbolic representation of the world and at the tantric yogic level it represents the human body.³⁶ After the Gurumandala *pūjā*, a lamp is offered to the deity. This represents the knowledge that destroys the net of illusions.³⁷ Another procedure is taking refuge, in which the participants take refuge in the Three Jewels: Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha. This ceremony is followed by a rite consisting of the *pūjā* of the Buddha mandala, Dharma mandala, Saṅgha mandala, and finally, the mandala of the particular deity who is being worshiped.

Each participant should trace the outline of these four mandalas on purified ground with sand (in Astami *vrata*) and yellow lime powder (in Vasundhara *vrata*). But nowadays most mandalas are printed on cards distributed to the participants for their convenience. John Locke describes the preparation of the mandala as follows: “More frequently at Janabaha (a vihar inside the Kathmandu Valley) they come with a large square of red cloth which they place in front of them. The assistant (the priest’s helper) moves along the line of participants with a wooden matrix into which the form of the mandalas has been carved. He fills this with sand and overturns it on to the red cloth of each.”³⁸ The *pūjā* of the Buddha mandala means saluting and offering various auspicious worship materials, such as flowers, holy water, sandal, and incense to the Five Dhyāni Buddhas and their consorts.³⁹

In exactly in the same manner, the *pūjā* of the Dharma mandala follows. The Dharma mandala consists of deities who are personifications of the Nava Grantha.⁴⁰ The Saṅgha mandala consists of nine bodhisattvas and Avalokitesvara. Avalokitesvara is considered the principal among these bodhisattvas.⁴¹ The participants, having worshiped the mandalas mentioned above, offer them to the related “jewel” for gaining enlightenment and cultivating compassion in order to free all worldly creatures from their miseries.⁴²

Caitya worship is also part of these Vajrayāna rituals. The *caityas* made from clay by the women participants are offered *pūjā* during these rites. Offering *pūjā* to *caityas* recalls the *Saddharma Pundarika* wherein the construction, preservation, and worship of *caityas* are considered highly meritorious deeds and prerequisite for acquiring merit and enlightenment.⁴³ Following the *caitya pūjā*, the worship of a particular deity’s mandala is performed.

The most important aspect among all these proceedings is the explanation of the eight moral precepts and the ten virtuous actions (*kusala karmas*). Most women participants do not know Sanskrit, so the priest explains the ten *kusala karmas* in Newari language. These *kusala karmas* are the same ones that are mentioned in the *Dasabhūmikasūtra*.⁴⁴ But the consequences of not following the *kusala karmas* are not always explained exactly in the same way as elucidated in the *Dasabhūmikasūtra*. For instance, in the *Dasabhūmikasūtra*, a person who does not refrain from taking life (*pranatiṣat*) has to take birth in the animal realm (*tiryagyoni*), will not live a full life, and so on.⁴⁵ But in Nepal it is explained that the person who commits suicide will be killed from birth to birth. Similarly, the third precept, sexual misconduct (*kamamithyachara*), is interpreted in Nepal as causing conflict between wife and husband, which results in having to live separately from loved ones in future lives. One who lies (*mrīsavadi*) will be born dumb in the next life. The result of harsh speech (*parusavacana*) is to always be accused of being false. This interpretation differs from that in the *Dasabhūmikasūtra*.⁴⁶ The result of frivolous talk (*sabhinnapralapa*) in Newar

Buddhism is to take birth in families always cursed by disputes and having to fight like cats and dogs. Avarice (*abhidhya*) is also interpreted differently in the Newar Buddhist context. In the *Dasabhūmikasūtra*, a person who does not refrain from avarice will always remain discontent,⁴⁷ whereas in Newar Buddhism the result is to face disgrace at every step. In the *Dasabhūmikasūtra*, malice results in being the brunt of others' malice, whereto in Nepal malicious people take birth in families of low status and must always do wretched work. In Newar Buddhism, wrong views (*mithyadristi*) are not explained in terms of no-soul or non-existence of God; instead *mithya dristi* is interpreted as not believing in virtuous and nonvirtuous deeds, which results in rebirth as a fool in future lives.

Although these explanations regarding the ten *kusala* and *akusala karmas* differ to some extent from the original interpretations in Mahāyāna Buddhism, they still help followers refrain from nonvirtuous actions and motivate them to follow the Buddhist principles that lead them to enlightenment. In addition, at the end of *pūjās*, one or two stories about a particular deity is related to the participants. Even though all the observances described above are performed for particular worldly purposes, a concept from Śāntideva's *Śikṣāmuccaya* is worth mentioning here: "One should abandon one's possessions along with one's ego and accumulate merit for the welfare of all beings. To do so, one should protect, purify, and enhance those belongings."⁴⁸

Problems Faced by Buddhist Laywomen

In a personal interview, a Buddhist Newar woman emphasized that, since the performance of *pūjā* and other arrangements are not compulsory, they do not feel obliged to follow moral precepts and take part in various *pūjās*. But she insists that following moral precepts and knowing the philosophical aspects of Buddhism through rituals both interesting and easy, so she tries her best to perform *pūjā* and observe the precepts as frequently as she can. This demonstrates how Buddhist Newar women in Nepal observe Buddhist ethics and encourage the younger generation to follow the precepts, too. Since women need help arranging the *pūjās*, this provides an opportunity for the younger generation learn the procedures and, to some extent, the philosophy as well.

NOTES

1. The inscription found in Changu (in the valley), which dates to 464 CE, is the first solid historical evidence found in Nepal to date.

2. D. L. Snellgrove, *Buddhist Himalaya*, 1992, p. 94; and S. S. Bagchi; ed., *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya Vastu*, Vol. II, 1970, p. 178.
3. “Buddho bhavet Chetranc Bhumi Bhagvato- Syavalokitesarasya...,” “Om Akshobhyamkshobhayasitagra murtimathagatam...,” “Samantabhadrambhuvibhadrakarina...,” Vajracharya Dhanvajra; Licchavi Kal Ka Abhilekha (Kathmandu: Nepalese and Asian Study Centre, B. S. 2030), pp. 386-87.
4. The Nava Granthas include the *Lalitavistara Sūtra* (dated sometime between 300 BCE and the sixth century CE), the *Saddharma Pundarika* (first century BCE), *Suvarna Prabhasa Sūtra* (300 CE), *Samadhiraj Sūtra* (400 CE, *Lankavatara Sūtra* (400 CE), and the *Gandavyūha Sūtra*, *Dasabhumika Sūtra*, and *Astasahasrika Prajna Paramita Sūtra* (100 BCE).
5. “*Suddharmaratna Kusumastavakacitanga*,” Vajracharya Dhanvajra Licchivi Kal Ka (Kathmandu: Abhilekha, B.S. 2030), p. 387.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 370.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 507.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 382.
9. *Crystal Mirror: Journal of the Tibetan Nyingma Meditation Center* (Berkeley: Dharma Publishing, 1984), p. 84.
10. Min Bahadur Shakya, *Princess Bhrikuti Devi* (Delhi: Faith India, 1997), p. 45.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
12. “*Adhibuddha mahatantra prayatnena nisedhithah; guhya prajñabhisekastu na grahya brahmcarina*,” Bodhi Path Pradipa Bhot Bhartiya Granthmala, p. 65.
13. Bhiksuni Heng Ching Shih, “Women’s Potential in Buddhism,” *Sakyadhita: Daughters of the Buddha*; edited by Karma Lekshe Tsomo (Ithaca, N.Y.: Snow Lion Publications, 1988), p. 98.
14. Brian Edward Brown, *The Buddha Nature: A Study of the Tathāgatagarbha and Ālayavijñāna* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1994).
15. *Ibid.*, pp. xxviii-xix.
16. *Evam ca cinte myahu Sariputra Katham nuevam bhavī sarvasattvāh, Dvātrinisatilakshan rupadharināh, swayam Prabha lokvidu swayambhu, Saddharma Pundarika, Upayakausala Parivarta*, Verse 60, *Buddhist Sanskrit Granthavali* 6, ed. P.L. Vaidya (Mithila Institute of Barbhāngh, 1960), p. 32.
17. “*Mantra nayam Parmita nayam Phalabetwatmakam ekaloli bbutam*,” in Vimal prabha (*Kalacakratantratika*) (Sarnath: Bhot Bhartiya Granthmala, 1986), p. 163.
18. *Advayavajra sangraha* (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1927), p. 23.
19. “*Savasattva Parinirvanabhetoh*,” in *Prajna Parmita Satasahasrika*, ed. P. Ghose (*Bibliotheca Indica*, 122.10), 130.3ff.
20. John K. Locke, *Karunamaya* (Kathmandu: Sahyogi Prakashn, 1980), p. 67.

21. “*Vipasyana, Sikhinaca visabhuva....*” Lalita Vistara, Baudh Sanskrit Granthavali 1, Mithila Vidya Pitha, Nid na Parivarta, p. 4.

22. *Gubhasamaja Tantra*, edited by Benoytosh Bhattacharya (Gaekwad Oriental Series), p. xviii.

23. “*Pancskandhab samasena Panch Buddha Prakirtitah*,” in Vasanttilakatika (Sarnath: Durlabha Baudh Granthmala), 1990.

24. These Dhyāni Buddhas and their families are as follows:

<i>Name</i>	<i>Color</i>	<i>Mudra</i>	<i>Vahana</i>	<i>Symbol</i>
Aksobhya	Blue	Bhuspasa	Elephant	Vajra
Vairocana	White	Dharmacakra	Dragon	Cakra
Amitabha	Red	Samadhi	Peacock	Lotus
Ratnasambhava	Yellow	Varada	Horse	Jewels
Amoghasiddhi	Green	Abhaya	Garuda	Visvavajra

Benoytosh Bhattacharya, *An Introduction to Buddhist Esotericism* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass), p. 130.

25. Benoytosh Bhattacharya, *Indian Buddhist Iconography* (Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1968), pp. 24-25.

26. *Guru Buddha namajnya duskaravrata caranam carya*, in *Hevajrat Tantra Tika* (London 1959), p. 21a.

27. A *vrata* is a religious vow, practice, pious observance, meritorious act of devotion, or austerity. Sir Monier Monier Williams, *A Sanskrit English Dictionary* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990), p. 1042.

28. *Yascakulputra Avalokitesworasy Bodhisattvasya Mahasttvasysputrakamo Matrugramo namskaram karoti tya putra prajayate* (*Saddharma Pundarika*, p. 251).

29. Shaky Min Bahadur, *The Iconography of Nepalese Buddhism* (Kathmandu: Handicraft Association of Nepal, 1999), p. 45.

30. “*Swahrdaye Prathamswar parinatam sitangumandalam vicintya tanmadhye kamaniyanil nirajantat kinjalke niskalan ka sasankmandalam tadupari Pitatanka ravijam Pasyet*,” *Sadhana mala*, Vol. I, B. Bhattacharya, ed. (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1968), p. 201. With similar words, the deity Tara is also invoked in Taravrata Vidhi, during the Tara worship: “*Tatah swahrdaya karena kshir samudra madhye pitpankarena visadala padmi tadupari akarene candramandalam Bhuvanadaryatara*,” *Aryatara vratavidhi*, p. 95.

31. Bhattacharya, *Buddhist Esoterism*, p. 95.

32. “*Iha hi dvidha sattvah, saiksa asaiksasc...*,” *Advayavajra sangraha*, p. 1.

33. A *mandala* is not an external object, but the manifestation of one deity in the different forms. The magic circle is nothing but a detailed mental exercise on the part of the lord of the *mandala* for the instruction of Tathagatas and *bodhisattvas* assembled near him. *Gubhya Samaj Tantra*, p. xviii.

34. *The Mahamudra Eliminating the Darkness of Ignorance* (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works & Archives, 1981), p. 159. “*Acaryat partarm nasti trailokyam sacaracare. Yasya prasadat prapyante sidhiyanekadha budhaih,*” *Advaya Siddhi*, Guhyadi Asta Sidhi Sangrali, Durlabh Baudh Granth Mala (Sarnath), pp. 33-35.
35. Shaky Min Bahadur, *Buddhist Iconography*, p. 11.
36. Locke, Karunamaya, p. 87.
37. *Jnana Pradipahat mobajala. Ye dipamala racayanti tatra, Guru Mandalarcana Pustakam*, late Amogha Vajra Vajracharya, ed., Newari era 1119, p. 18.
38. Locke, *Karunamaya*, p. 190.
39. Om Vairocanaya vajra puspa, Om Akshobhyaya, Om Mamakiya, Sri Vasundhara vrata and Vidhi Katha, p. 1.
40. (1) Om Prajnaparmitataya, Om Gandhavyaaya,” *Arya Tara Puja vidhi* (Kathmandu: Hira Ratna Vajracarya, n.d.), p. 41; (2) *Om prajna Pamitaya*, etc. Shri Vasundhara Devi vrata Katha, p. 4; and (3) *Prjnaparmitaya pite mahaswete*, Astmivrata Vidhi Folio, p. 5b.
41. *Om Aryavalokitesworaya, Om Armatraya, Om Aryagagangang... Arya Tara Vidhi* (Kathmandu, n.d.), p.45; and *Shri Vasundhara Devi vrata Katha*, p. 6.
42. *Ratnatraya me sarnam, sarva prati disamegha, anumode Jagat Punyam Buddha Bodhou dadhe namah*, Arya Tara Vidhi, p. 47.
43. Shaddharma Pundarika, Upaya kausala Parivarta, Verses 78-82.
44. *Pranaitpatat prativirath* (not taking life), *adattadanat prativiratah* (not stealing), *kamamithya caraprativiratah* (not engaging in sexual misconduct), *anrtvacanatprativiritah* (not telling lies), *pisunavacanat prativiritah* (not speaking maliciously), *parusavacanat prativiritah* (not speaking harshly), *sambhinnapralapartprati viritah* (not engaging in frivolous talk), *anabhidhya* (abandoning avarice), *avyapamcitta* (abandoning malice), and *samyagdrti* (right view).” *Dasabhmikastra* (Baudh Sanskrit Granthavali, 1967), pp. 15-16.
45. *Tiryagyonimupanayati. yama lokamupanayati*. Ibid., p. 17.
46. *Parusyam...amanapasravananam kalabhvacanatama*. (“The person who speaks parusavacan will necessarily be engaged in disputes.” Ibid.
47. *Abhidhya...asantustitam mehatechhani ca*. Ibid.
48. “*Atma bhavasya Bhojganayadhvriteh subhasya ca utsargah sarvasattvebhyastadraksha Suddhi vardhanam,*” *Śiksamuccaya*, Buddhist Sanskrit Texts, No. 11, 1960, p. 1.







Himalayan Buddhist Nuns

Pacha Lobzang Chhodon

The Himalayan region stretches across the northern border of India and includes the regions of Ladakh, Zangskar, Lahaul, Spiti, Kinnaur, Garwal, Sikkim and Mon-Tawang. These areas are mountainous, with a severe winter climate. As result, the people are scattered and the standard of living is not high. Mahāyāna Buddhism has been the religion of the people in the area for a thousand years.

Many excellent and well-known female Buddhist practitioners have come from the Indian Himalayan region. One outstanding practitioner named Jomo Shilamo was a nun from Dorje Dzong Nunnery, which is located in Zangskar. “*Jomo*” means “nun” and Shilamo was the name of the village she was from. As a result of her strong and sincere practice, one day as Jomo Shilamo was praying in the assembly hall of Dorje Dzong Nunnery, she flew up and out of the window. Afterwards, she was never seen again. Many of her possessions, including her ritual hat and Dharma books, are still displayed at Dorje Dzong nunnery.

There are many other stories about remarkable female practitioners in our regions. This shows that, if great effort is made, it is possible to achieve high realizations in a female body.

Laywomen’s Knowledge of Buddhism

In the Himalayan region, most children learn the basic Dharma principles from their mothers. Specifically, each child learns to practice ethical discipline and to refrain from the ten non-virtuous actions. Although Himalayan Buddhist laywomen do not receive a very detailed education, they have very strong faith in the Three Jewels. Despite the fact that they often live in critical economic conditions, they are happy to make offerings to the Saṅgha. These offerings usually consist of barley, butter, and dried cheese.

Unfortunately, the education that children receive in public schools in the Himalayan region is not very good. Furthermore, the local language and culture are almost ignored. Because young Buddhist laywomen do not have a proper understanding of Buddhism, they may begin to lose their religion if they leave their home areas to receive higher education or marry someone from another community. Of course, it is important to learn the national language and to be familiar with the mainstream culture, but some way must be found to give girls and boys a solid knowledge of their primary language and instill pride in their own culture. In this way, Buddhism, which is not the prevailing religion in India, can be preserved and continue to benefit the local people.

Fortunately, there are some private schools where children can receive an education that emphasizes Buddhism and their own culture. For instance, in my home area of Spiti about 300 children are currently able to receive a better education. This year, hostels especially for girls were built to ensure that at least half the students will be female. This initiative could benefit from private as well as public financial help.

Nuns in the Indian Himalayas

As mentioned earlier, there have been many famous nuns from the Himalayas. However, there are not enough nunneries or retreat facilities for nuns. Usually, when a girl becomes a nun, she stays at home and does not receive either secular or philosophical education. She may know how to read texts, but she is not taught the meaning of the texts. Since there is a great shortage of qualified teachers, male or female, in our nunneries, nuns often do not get a chance to study their religion properly. Consequently, they often live at home, acting as little more than servants.

Some years ago, Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo began to build nunneries in Spiti, Kinnaur, and Zangskar, but it has been very difficult to find excellent teachers because of the remote location and the harsh living conditions. The number of nuns staying in each of these nunneries is consequently very small. Ven. Tenzin Palmo, who studied medicine at the Tibetan Medical Institute (Men Tse Khang) in Dharamsala returned to her native Ladakh and developed a program of studies in the pre-existing nunneries. Although the Indian government has provided some funds to build classrooms and hostels, she has also had difficulty recruiting excellent teachers.

Jamyang Chöling Institute

In 1988, Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo founded Jamyang Chöling in Dharamsala, near His Holiness the Dalai Lama's residence in exile, to educate Himalayan Buddhist nuns who otherwise would have no opportunity to

receive any formal schooling or spiritual education. Jamyang Chöling is a non-sectarian nunnery that recognizes the beauty and value in understanding all Buddhist traditions. Its program includes meditation, philosophical debate, and community awareness as part of the daily practice. Many nuns from the Indian Himalayan region have come to study at Jamyang Chöling. Since the first group of nuns arrived in 1988, they have had the opportunity to study five major Buddhist philosophical texts under the guidance of many excellent and well-known teachers of Buddhist philosophy. They are the first group of nuns in recent times to have the chance to study the major texts that are traditionally studied at Tibetan monastic universities. Other Himalayan nuns are now studying well in other nunneries built in India by Tibetans in exile.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama promotes and encourages improved education for nuns in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. In 1995, for instance, he instituted an annual winter debate called Jang Konchö, where nuns from Indian nunneries can gather and develop their understanding through reasoning and argumentation. This has greatly benefitted the nuns' studies. Previously, only monks were able to attend such winter debate sessions. The main aim of Himalayan nuns, once we finish our studies, is to improve Buddhist education for women residing in the Indian Himalayan region.

Some of us will return to our home areas, but our nunnery, Jamyang Chöling, will remain an important center for training female Buddhist teachers. Since Dharamsala is a very important center for Buddhist studies, there is a great need to receive funds and extend our facilities. In this way, we will be able to build a new hostel and eventually increase the number of nuns enrolled. Funding is necessary especially because many of the potential student nuns come from poor families and are unable to afford studies in Dharamsala.

We hope that the Indian Buddhist nuns who are now receiving a good education will be able to revive the Buddhadharma in the Indian Himalayas. We also hope to bring peace to both the Buddhist and non-Buddhist world, in accordance with the wisdom and teachings of His Holiness the Dalai Lama.





Great Women Practitioners of Buddhadharma: Inspiration in Modern Times

Sherab Sangmo

The Buddha turned the Wheel of the Dharma three times for the benefit of all beings and from that time there have been many in female form who have attained great realization. These extraordinary women practitioners have been from many countries, had different backgrounds, spoke different languages, and practiced in various schools of Buddhism, but all were “Daughters of the Buddha.” Some of these women were laywomen and some were nuns. Their stories can serve to inspire our own lives and Dharma practice. So, speaking from my own experience within Tibetan Buddhism, I would like to recount the life of one extraordinary woman practitioner whom I have had the great blessing to meet personally.

In the early part of the 1900s in central Tibet lived a nun whose name was Nene Chöden Sangmo. As a child, she wanted nothing more in life than to be a nun, but her parents made her stay at home to take care of all their animals. Each morning she went out to the pastures with the yaks and sheep, and passed the day in contemplation. On the way home, flowers bloomed spontaneously along the path where she walked. In the evening, when she reached home, her parents were always angry with her and scolded her for coming home too late. Finally, she decided to run away. She made her way to Bukum Sumdo, a retreat place near Terdrul Nunnery in Drikung, a region where there were many practitioners staying in retreat. There she became a nun and built herself a small meditation hut. At first she had to go out to beg for food, but eventually she decided to stay in meditation rather than take so much time getting food to eat. She went inside her hut, walled up the door, and remained in isolated retreat. People said that while she was in her hut doing her practice, all the birds and animals in the area sang the *mantra* of Guru Padmasambhava.

When Nene Chöden Sangmo finally came out of retreat, her footprint remained imbedded in the rock beside her hut. Because of these signs, she was considered to be an emanation of Yeshe Tsogyal, who was one of the main disciples of the great Guru Padmasambhava and the first female Buddhist in Tibet to achieve realization. Yeshe Tsogyal herself had prophesized that there would always be one of her emanations at Terdrul Nunnery.

One day an 18-year-old girl was brought to Nene Chöden Sangmo by her distraught parents. This girl, who was renowned for her exquisite beauty and brilliant mind, was their only daughter. Her proud mother had planned to give her splendid jewels when she married. One day the girl had gone for a walk in the mountains and had encountered five lovely maidens who challenged her to a contest to see who was the most beautiful and talented. Since the girl was quite proud and self-confident, she was sure she could easily win. The five girls said “Can you do like this?” And they rose up into the air and disappeared from sight. Since that time, the girl’s mind became very confused. Later, in accordance with a divination, a lama advised her family that, in order to recover, she should have become a nun.

When Nene Chöden Sangmo met the girl, she said that the previous night she had had a very auspicious dream indicating that this girl was an emanation of Yeshe Tsogyal. In her dream, a mad girl came to her bringing a piece of white woolen cloth and asking her to dye it. She dyed the cloth and the color became perfectly fixed. This was a sign that this girl would perfectly absorb all the teachings.

Nene Chöden Sangmo then sent the girl to live at the nearby Terdrul Nunnery that had been founded by Yeshe Tsogyal. Here the young nun became a nun with the name Sherab Tarchen and studied the Dharma very diligently. She spent hours in debate, alternating roles by placing a white stone and a black stone on the ground and debating each side of each topic in turn. Her two main teachers were Rahor Chödrak Rinpoche and Bötrul Tenpe Nyima Rinpoche. After a period of study, she spent many years in retreat. She became well-known for her scholarship and her Dzogchen practice. Only at certain times were people allowed to see her and receive her blessing. She became known as the Drikung Khandro.

One day two women *sadhus* (mendicants) from India appeared at her door. They offered her some rice tied in their shawls. They then requested her to give them some of the food she was eating as *prasad* (blessed food). The three women spent the entire day talking together. The other nuns nearby heard them speaking a strange language that Drikung Khandro was able to understand and speak. She herself later said that it was the language of India. In the evening, as the two *sadhus* were leaving, they told Drikung Khandro that she should go to India and that they would take care of her there. The two women

walked away, never turning their backs to Drikung Khandro and then vanished into the air.

Until that time, Nene Chöden Sangmo had never considered going to India, but she believed that the women *sadhus* had come to help her. Not long after, sometime around 1959, she had to leave Tibet because of the communist invasion. She traveled to India via Nepal, stopping at various holy pilgrimage sites throughout Nepal and India. When she reached the town of Rewalsar in Northern India, the site of the sacred lake known to Tibetan Buddhists as Tso Pema, she took up residence in one of the many caves on the mountainside. She practiced for years there and gathered quite a few disciples around her.

Not only nuns, but also monks and high lamas, sought her out to listen to her teachings. Having achieved a high level of realization, Drikung Khandro had the capacity to see the future and to very clearly know what was going on in people's mind. Sometimes she asked disciples why they had done certain things while in town, and so on, so her disciples were quite in awe of her. Although she did not teach frequently, she showed great kindness in arranging for nuns to receive teachings from highly qualified lamas. Drikung Khandro herself took many teachings from Khunu Rinpoche. In the 1970s, she went with Khunu Rinpoche and a few disciples to Shashur Gumpa at Keylong, which is located in the region of Lahaul in the Indian Himalayas. It was during this time that I met Drikung Khandro. I was one of the youngest nuns who sat and listened for hours to the stories of her life. Not long after, Khunu Rinpoche entered the final stage of meditation and passed away. Even though Drikung Khandro was only in her early 50s, her health failed and finally she also passed away two years later, in 1979. It is worth noting that she remained in the final state of meditation for one week. Now there is another emanation of Yeshe Tsogyal, the successor to Drikung Khandro, at Terdrul Nunnery in Tibet.

At the present time, there is a steady number of female practitioners of high spiritual attainment among Tibetan Buddhists in Nepal, Tibet, Bhutan, Sikkim, India, and the West. I will briefly mention a few such women with whom I am familiar. In southern Tibet, there is Semo Dechen, the daughter of H. H. Dudjom Rinpoche, and in a small village in Kham Dzogchen in Eastern Tibet there is a laywoman by the name of Tare Lhamo. In Sikkim, there is Khyentse Khandro Tsering Chödrön, the wife of the great Lama Jamyang Khyentse Chökyi Lodro. These lay female practitioners have brought, and continue to bring, great benefit to sentient beings through their enlightened activities. In Kham Gawa in Tibet there is a nun called Tsele Karchu Wangmo. She is the abbess of a nunnery and is said to be several hundred years old. In Bhutan, a famous nun named Jetsun Lopönma Paldron just recently passed away. She was the abbess of Chakarmo Nunnery, a great poet, and a practitio-

ner who reached a high level of realization. These all are women of our present time, not just figures from the past. They can be a source of inspiration and guidance for laywomen as well as monastic women.

It is of vital importance that we, the Buddhist women of today, work selflessly together to preserve and spread the Buddhadharma. Why is it so important that we do so? It is because the teachings of Lord Buddha are most relevant for contemporary society. In the *Bodhicaryāvatara*, Śāntideva says that all the disharmony and unhappiness in the world are the result of desire for personal satisfaction, greed, and self-seeking without concern for others. He says that all true happiness comes from placing others before self and acting for the benefit of all beings. We must all consciously develop the mind of *bodhicitta* in order to have compassion and kindness towards all beings.

Just as the sound of thunder is pleasant to the ear of the peacock, may these few words bring inspiration to others. I am grateful to all those women Dharma practitioners who have dedicated their lives to practice and to serving the Buddhadharma in order to bring peace and harmony in this disturbed world. May we all pray for world peace and may all beings of the six realms experience true happiness.



Buddhist Nuns of Vietnam

Thich Nu Dien Van Hue

After a period of dormancy under the French colonial regime, the renaissance of Vietnamese Buddhism has been in full swing since 1963. In the old days, nuns' activities were hardly worth mentioning. Their ordinations, studies, and practice were completely under the leadership of monks. In 1965, for the first time, Vietnamese nuns developed their own separate leadership teams and more and more nunneries appeared. Buddhist schools and universities for nuns also came into existence all over South Vietnam, especially in Hue, Nha Trang, and Ho Chi Minh City. There were many famous, brilliant nun masters, but their activities were limited to building temples, training disciples within their own pagodas, and managing Buddhist schools for nuns. Teaching Dharma was still the monks' field.

After 1975, under the new regime, Vietnamese Buddhist organizations were restructured and the nuns' leadership teams did not function anymore. For better or for worse, a special feature of Vietnamese Buddhism is that the activities of monks and nuns depend almost entirely on their own masters. Therefore, in recent years nunneries have again appeared in great numbers and the number of nuns has increased dramatically. In Vietnam today, the number of nuns is estimated to be ten times the number of monks. Nuns can be seen everywhere. Whenever the National Buddhist Congregation opens Buddhist schools and universities, the student nuns are always the overwhelming majority. Nuns also score higher in the examination results. The cultural standard of nuns has improved greatly as compared to earlier times when nuns only did domestic work within the pagodas.

These days many nuns are interested in registering for courses at secular universities in Vietnam as well as in foreign countries such as India, China, Australia, and France. Unfortunately, however, there are still too few nun teachers who take up the noble duty of spreading the Buddha's teaching to

teachers who take up the noble duty of spreading the Buddha's teaching to the people. Most nuns pursue studies or charity activities, such as helping lepers, old people, the handicapped, and poor people in distant or isolated areas. These activities are manifestations of the benevolent and compassionate spirit of the bodhisattva practice. But in my humble opinion, these activities are not enough. If we have not mastered our mind, we can easily become spoiled while going about doing social work, with unfortunate results. Many nuns come under the influence of pleasure or fame, and some have even returned to the mundane world and become the subject of critical comments. Training the mind, which the Buddha called “helping people to realize and manifest their own Buddha nature,” is considered essential. For this reason, these days many nuns want to practice at Vietnamese Chan nunneries.

Vien Chieu Chan Nunnery

The name of our nunnery is Thien Vien Vien Chieu. “Thien Vien” means a Chan nunnery and “Vien Chieu” means “the shining of perfect wisdom.” Founded in 1974, Thien Vien Vien Chieu was the first Chan nunnery established by Chan Master Thich Thanh Tu’s sect in Vietnam. At the beginning, we had only 15 determined nuns. Because of the war, we had a very hard time in those days. We lacked food, clothes, medicines, and even shelter. We had to clear portions of the jungle practically with our bare hands to build a place to live and practice. We were all from the city, so we did not know much about manual hard work and agriculture. But we were young, with strong faith in the worthiness of the Buddha’s teachings. We struggled hard for 28 years to improve our place. Day by day, more and more eager nuns and laywomen joined us, until today there are 100 nuns in our community. The nuns who joined increased so greatly that we have had to open ten more nunneries with roughly 800 nuns. To support ourselves, we grow our own rice and vegetables and sell the surplus. We practice under the guidance of Zen Master Thich Thanh Tu, one of the most greatly admired masters in the present day. At the end of the twentieth century, Master Thich Thanh Tu was the first to open Chan monasteries for monks and nuns in Vietnam. He has revived the Zen spirit of the old days, especially the Golden Age of the Tran Dynasty. This dynasty was famous for Truc Lam, the great ascetic, who was formerly King Tran Nhan Tong.

Our Way of Practice

The purpose of our practice is to truly live our own Buddha nature. Unless we train our mind, ordinarily we get carried away by our mind’s endless thinking. To master the mind, we must free our mind of attachment to things

and deluded ideas. There are several methods to do this. Our way of practice is influenced by the first six Chinese patriarchs, especially the teaching that Patriarch Bodhidharma gave Patriarch Hui K'e about mastering the mind, and Patriarch Hui Neng's teachings: Take no thought as the object, non-objectivity as the foundation, and non-attachment as the fundamental principle. We turn inward to watch our mind. When we see thoughts coming and going, we keep ourselves awake so that we do not get involved or carried away by them. Once we are no longer carried away by our thoughts, we dwell with a non-dualistic mind. This is the way to truly live up to our own Buddha nature.

Daily Life

We get up at 3:00 am and sit for meditation until 5:00 am. After breakfast, we work. Some nuns work in the rice fields, some in the vegetable gardens and orchards, and some in the kitchen. As our nunnery becomes larger, we have begun to work in new areas: teaching at Buddhist Schools, holding regular Dharma classes for Buddhist followers, receiving guests, writing books, training children in the neighborhood, and so forth. The morning chores end at 10 am and we have lunch at 11 am. In the afternoon, we either study *sūtras* and Chan histories or do sitting meditation from 2 to 4 pm. After that, we continue working until 5:00 pm, when we have a light dinner and relax. At 6 pm we chant the *sūtras*. The evening meditation sitting is from 7:30 to 8:30 pm and at 9:00 pm we go to bed.

Conclusion

At the present time, violence has dramatically increased all over the world. People complain that modern life is full of stresses and strains. More and more people suffer from mental diseases. How many people can say they have found peace and feel happy every day? We cannot be at peace if we have a troubled mind. Let each of us find peace in ourselves, then world peace will surely be restored. We had better change ourselves than change the world.

The purpose of training our mind is to achieve this inner peace. We would like to contribute to world peace by sharing the Buddha's teachings. Anybody who makes an effort to practice under the guidance of the Buddha's teachings will see the wonderful effect. This helps people develop faith, and faith helps them make more and more progress until the aim is achieved. May this conference contribute to world peace through the teachings of the Buddha!





A Survey of the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in Vietnam

Thích Nu Dong Anh (Nguyen Thi Kim Loan)

Due to geography and traditional relationships between Vietnam and China, it was previously assumed that Vietnamese Buddhism was introduced and directly influenced by Chinese Buddhism. However, based on the discovery of ancient documents and archeological evidence, recent research attest that Vietnamese Buddhism came directly from Indian Buddhism.¹ The date of introduction, although still controversial, is generally assumed to be sometime during the first century CE. Many pagodas and Buddhist research centers were built in the north of Vietnam.²

The focus of this paper is not the history of Vietnamese Buddhism, but the foundation and activities of the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in Vietnam. The history mentioned above is simply to establish a time-frame for the establishment of the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha and to indicate the circumstances in which it began, whether as a requirement of society or as a development of the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha. Further, I wish to explore the role of the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in Vietnam in general, and within Vietnamese Buddhism, in particular.

Foundations of the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha

Buddhism was probably introduced to Vietnam in the first century CE by Indian monks. Ancient documents record the names of many Indian Buddhist monks, such as Mārajīvaka, Kalyāṇarūci, and Kangseng Houei. These monks came by the sea route which was used for trade by Vietnamese and Indian traders. A historically significant *stupa* has been recently been discovered that mentions the great Indian king Asoka, and also a book by Master Meou-Po, written in an ancient Vietnamese language and now translated into modern Vietnamese. This document clearly mentions the situation of Vietnamese

Buddhism at that time and the work that was done by Indian and Vietnamese missionary monks. These sources make no trace of Vietnamese nuns at the outset of Vietnamese Buddhism.

The history of Vietnam shows that Vietnam was dominated by Chinese invaders for almost ten centuries, from the first through the tenth centuries CE, although this domination was interrupted periodically by uprisings of the Vietnamese people. Some believe that it would have been very difficult to establish the order of nuns under the circumstances of Chinese domination. Significantly, the first Vietnamese to strongly and successfully fight against the Chinese invaders, from 40-43 CE, were two sisters named Trung Trac and Trung Nhi.³ If the competence of women was recognized by society in general, why not in Buddhism? Perhaps the reason is that this successful revolt against the Chinese invaders did not last long, hence nuns did not have much chance to establish themselves.

Vietnamese history records that from 544 CE to 620 CE, Vietnam achieved its independence for periods that were short in duration, but long enough for the Vietnamese Buddhists to establish two Chan sects. The first was established by the Indian monk Vinaruci in 580⁴ and the second was established by the Chinese monk Vo Ngon Thong in 820. Both of these founder monks had Vietnamese disciples and these disciples became the successors of these two Chan sects. Once again, we find no names of Vietnamese nuns from the beginnings of these sects until the twelfth century.⁵ In the tenth century CE, a well-organized army led by Ngo Quyen was successful in fighting against the Chinese invaders and achieved full independence for Vietnam. In the dynasty he established and in two later dynasties, Dinh and Le, many Vietnamese Buddhist monks joined the royal court as advisors to the king, diplomatic envoys, and teachers of princes and princesses.

The Le Dynasty, which was the first and strongest dynasty Vietnam gained full independence, was founded by Ly Cong Uan, a disciple of the monk advisor Master Van Hanh. The king himself became a Buddhist novice, was educated in Buddhist doctrines in a pagoda, and studied with his master until the time came for him to assume leadership of the army at court. Due to his monastic background, he strongly supported Buddhism in building pagodas in all regions of the country. At this time, Vietnamese Buddhism was at its peak, but even during this significant period, the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha was not yet established.

It was not until the twelfth century, in the year 1115, that the first nun appears in the list of 19 generations of the Vinaruci Chan sect in Vietnam. This nun's religious name was Dieu Nhan and she was the granddaughter of King Ly Thai Tong, the second king of the Ly dynasty.⁶ She received full ordination from Master Chan Khong and was the head of Huong Hai Pagoda in

Phe Dong Village. She can be called the founder of the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in Vietnam. From that time on, the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha continued to develop. Many women from royal families, including Chieu Tu, Tuyen Chan, Le Bao, and Tinh Quang, entered and devoted their lives to Buddhism. Both the Bhikkhu and Bhikkhunī Saṅgha developed quickly and became strongly established. The chronicle *Truyen Ky Man Luc* by Nguyen Du records that monks and nuns constituted more than half the common people.⁷ Other sources record that there were at least 30,000 monks and nuns at the time.⁸ From then until the last four centuries, the numbers of nuns increased or decreased due to social conditions, but these changes were not significant enough to be emphasized in the Vietnamese Buddhist histories.

The Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries

One of the most significant aspects of Vietnamese Buddhism is the Buddhist Saṅgha. During the decades between 1930 and 1960 and even later, despite the domination of French invaders and the civil war in Vietnam, Vietnamese Buddhist Associations were established for the south of Vietnam (1931), central Vietnam (1932), and the north of Vietnam (1934). In these associations, efforts to study Buddhism, build Buddhist institutes, and publish Buddhist books and newspapers continued in all regions in the country.

Vietnamese nuns at the time were well-trained in Buddhist doctrines and encouraged by the Bhikkhu Saṅgha to teach Buddhism. During this period, Ven. Nu Dieu Tinh emerged as the first torchbearer of Vietnamese nuns.⁹ She translated some Mahāyāna Buddhist *sūtras* into modern Vietnamese, was editor of *Tu Bi Am* magazine, and always encouraged Vietnamese nuns to work in harmony to develop the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha. She studied Buddhism widely and became well known as a Buddhist scholar. She was invited by the royal court to teach Buddhism to the queen and princesses. She also initiated classes for the education and training of Vietnamese nuns, becoming a significant nun in Vietnamese Buddhist history. Meanwhile, similar programs for the education and training of nuns were established in the south of Vietnam by Chi Kien, Dieu Ninh, and others; in central Vietnam, the names of nuns such as Dieu Huong, Dieu Vien, Dieu Hong, Cat Tuong, Vien Minh, The Yen, The Quan, The Thanh, and others are recorded; and in the north of Vietnam we find the names of Dam Soan, Dam Dau, Dam Thu, and others. The successful result of these activities was the establishment of the Vietnam Buddhist Saṅgha in May 6, 1951, which unified six Buddhist associations from the northern, central, and southern regions of Vietnam in one association.

One of the most brilliant times of Vietnamese Buddhism was the revolution in 1963 to resist the government of the first republic of Vietnam headed

by the Catholic dictator President Ngo Dinh Diem. He applied policies that worked to the advantage of the Catholic Church and destroyed Buddhism by unacceptable means. For example, on the Buddha's birthday, he did not allow the Buddhist pagodas throughout the country to hang Buddhist flags. On the contrary, he used tanks and weapons to kill Buddhist adherents who assembled to hear talks and commemorate the Buddha's birthday. When the Vietnamese Buddhist Saṅgha requested an investigation into these tragic events, he rejected their requests and continuously used many methods to terrorize and suppress Buddhists. The Vietnamese Buddhist Saṅgha demonstrated peacefully and used nonviolent means to create some awareness in him, but in vain. His reign collapsed due to the continuous struggles of the Vietnamese Buddhist Saṅgha between May 8 and November 1, 1963.¹⁰ Finally, he and his brother, the president's advisor, were killed by the army. During this most difficult time, the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha worked in harmony with the Bhikkhu Saṅgha to gain equality for Buddhists in Vietnam. Many nuns sacrificed their lives at that time and gained the respect not only of the Buddhist community but also the community of non-Buddhists. Over the centuries, the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha made many great contributions to Vietnamese Buddhism.

Nowadays, Vietnamese Buddhists are still unified under one central Buddhist association which includes Mahāyāna Buddhism, Theravāda Buddhism, and an indigenous tradition called Mendicant Buddhism. This is a significant accomplishment of Vietnamese Buddhism. Young monks and nuns from all these different schools are trained in the same institutes and universities. Traditionally Vietnamese Buddhist Nuns are firmly established and active in social work and charitable activities. Nuns can be nurses, adoptive mothers of war orphans, sisters of street children, mothers of abandoned children, and family members to the handicapped and elderly.

Vietnamese Buddhist nuns do not strictly observe the eight special rules (*gurudharmas*) and therefore are not subject to the limitations and inequalities of these rules. Perhaps this is the result of the unique history of Vietnamese Buddhism. In Vietnam, Buddhists share the difficulties of teaching Dharma and also the joys of the Dharma.

NOTES

1. Le Manh That, *Lich Su Phat Giao Viet Nam, Vol. 1* (Hue: Nha Xuat Ban Thuan Hoa, 1999), pp. 11-12; and Nguyen Lang, *Viet Nam Phat Giao Su Luan* (Saigon: Nha Xuat Ban la Boi, 1973), pp. 15-28.

2. Minh Chi, Ly Kim Hoa, Ha Thuc Minh, Ha Van Tan, Nguyen Tai Thu, *The History of Buddhism in Vietnam* (Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House, 1992), p. 4.

3. Nguyen Khac Vien, *Vietnam: A Long History* (Hanoi: Gioi Publisher, 1993), pp. 25-26; Le Manh That, *Lich Su Phat Giao Viet Nam*, pp. 78-79.
4. Nguyen Tai Thu, *The History of Buddhism in Vietnam*, pp. 71-72.
5. Le Manh That, *Lich Su Phat Giao Viet Nam, Vol. II*, pp. 108-110.
6. Thich Minh Tue, *Lich Su Phat Giao Viet Nam*, p. 216.
7. Nguyen Lang, *Viet Nam Phat Giao Su Luan* (Saigon: Nha Xuat Ban la Boi, 1973), p. 470.
8. Ibid., p. 471.
9. Nguyen Lang, *Viet Nam Phat Giao Su Luan, Vol. III*, p. 261.
10. Nguyen Khac Vien, *Vietnam: A Long History*, p. 307.





Nuns of the Mendicant Tradition in Vietnam

Thich Nu Tri Lien (Nguyen Thi Tuyet)

There are two main traditions of Buddhism in the world today, namely, Theravāda and Mahāyāna. Besides these two traditions, in Vietnam there is also the Vietnam Mendicant Saṅgha, a new feature of Vietnam Buddhism. The Vietnamese Mendicant Saṅgha was founded in 1946 by Master Minh Dang Quang, who was born at Phu Hau, Tam Binh, Vinh Long, in 1923.¹ After his disappearance in 1954,² his disciples carried on propagating his way of practice, which has spread from the west to south and central Vietnam. In 1966, the Mendicant Saṅgha was officially recognized and is known as the Congregation of the Vietnam Mendicant Saṅgha (Giao Hoi Tang Gia Khat Si Vietnam).³

In 1975, Vietnam became independent and unified, after which time all Vietnamese Buddhist organizations were unified under the name Vietnam Buddhist Saṅgha in 1982.⁴ The Vietnam Buddhist Saṅgha consists of three traditions, namely, Mahāyāna, Theravāda, and the Mendicant Tradition, also called the Mendicant Sect. The doctrine of the Vietnam Mendicant Saṅgha consists of elements of Mahāyāna and Theravāda, with certain refinements and adjustments in accordance with the Southern Vietnamese mind and the pivotal ideas of the founder Master Minh Dang Quang, as described in his written work *Chon Ly (Truth)*.⁵

Monks (*bhikkhus*) and nuns (*bhikkhunīs*) wear yellow robes and go for alms like monks and nuns of the Theravada tradition. At the same time, they maintain a vegetarian diet and the *bhikkhunīs* observe the 348 rules⁶ of Dharmaguptaka Vinaya like nuns of the Mahāyāna tradition.⁷ There is a Theravāda tradition in Vietnam, but it has no order of nuns. Just recently, in February 2002, the first two Vietnamese Theravāda *bhikkhunīs* were ordained at an ordination

ceremony organized in Sri Lanka. The Pāli canon of the Theravāda tradition lists 311 rules for *bhikkhunis*.⁸

Vietnam Mendicant nuns spend their life traveling,⁹ changing their dwellings every three to six months.¹⁰ They do not handle money¹¹ and propagate the Dharma mainly by going on alms rounds.¹² They chant the *sūtras* daily in Vietnamese, unlike the Theravāda tradition, which uses Pāli, and the Mahāyāna tradition, which uses Chinese with Vietnamese pronunciation. Mendicant nuns study both the Nikāya *sūtras* and the Mahāyāna *sūtras*.¹³ Their method of practice is similar to other Buddhist traditions, namely, the practice of precepts (*śīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*prajna*),¹⁴ but they practice Tathagata meditation (*śamathā* and *vipassanā*) like the Theravāda tradition,¹⁵ while the Mahāyāna tradition practices meditation in the tradition of the Patriarchs, using *kungan* and *huatou*.

Since 1975 Vietnamese society has undergone many changes, including economic as well as government policy changes, so nuns and monks must live at places where they are registered. The first female disciples of Master Minh Dang Quang were the late venerable nuns Huynh Lien, Bach Lien, and Thanh Lien, all of whom contributed substantially to the formation and development of the Mendicant Order of Nuns. The late venerable nun Huynh Lien (1923–1987), who became the first head nun of the Vietnam Mendicant Order of Nuns, was born at Phu My, Tien Giang, in 1923. Huynh Lien, along with Bach Lien and Thanh Lien, were ordained in 1947 at Linh Buu Pagoda under the guidance of Minh Dang Quang.¹⁶ With her innate intelligence, strong will, and conscientious effort in practicing the Dharma, Huynh Lien was delegated by her master to lead all the nuns in the Vietnam Mendicant Order of Nuns. For 40 years (from 1947 to 1987), she devoted her life to propagating the Dharma. She wished to protect and help women, so she made the following vow: “I vow that I will eternally be reborn in a woman’s body, because there are countless miserable women in the world, and because [as a woman] it will be very easy to be close to them and help them, even though I know it will be a difficult task.”¹⁷ She was responsible for the construction of Goc Phuong Pagoda, the central pagoda of the Mendicant Order of Nuns, built in Ho Chi Minh City in 1958.

There are now more than 120 pagodas in this tradition,¹⁸ with over 1,000 nuns in three regions of Vietnam: west, south, and central. Huynh Lien’s great loving kindness and boundless compassion extended to all human beings. She took part in many charitable works for the good of society, such as establishing orphanages and schools, visiting hospitals and prisons, and so forth. Nhat Chi Mai Orphanage was the central charitable institution of the Mendicant nuns, with many branches in various provinces. Between 1963 and 1975, she led the Mendicant nuns in many activities for preserving Buddhism, promoting peace,

ensuring equal rights for men and women, and so on. After 1975, she was assigned some important duties in the Vietnam government.¹⁹ She enthusiastically helped anyone who came to ask for her assistance and was respected by all classes of society.

Huynh Lien recognized that the quality of nuns would improve in relation to the educational opportunities offered to them. Therefore, she always supported, encouraged, and urged all the nuns to raise their cultural standard and improve their knowledge of the Pāli Tripitaka. At Ngoc Phuong Pagoda, she established many courses in Dhamma, Pāli, English, Chinese, literature, painting, and so on, which drew many young nuns from all Mendicant nun pagodas. She was not only a writer, but also a poet. She composed many works of prose and verse, including about 3,000 verses of poetry and 1,000 prose works. Especially important, she translated some *sūtras* from Pāli or Chinese into Vietnamese language in verse for daily chanting,²⁰ including the *Amitbha Sūtra*, the *Universal Door*, the *Sūtra in Forty-two Chapters*, the *Dhammapada*, the *No-self*, *The Last Teaching of the Buddha*, and *Respectful Devotion to One's Parents*. This was helpful for the chanting master as well as the listeners, because it made the texts easy to understand, easy to remember, and suitable for all classes of society.

The popularity of the Vietnam Mendicant Saṅgha has spread rapidly among the masses. During the half century of its existence, the number of pagodas, monks, and nuns has continued to increase day by day. The most important reason is that all nuns and pagodas belonging to the Mendicant Order of Nuns have very close relations and contacts among themselves. Any nun who belongs to the Mendicant Order of Nuns is allowed to stay and study in any pagoda that is suitable for her practice. Every year from the fifteenth day of the fourth lunar month to fifteenth day of the seventh lunar month, all nuns gather at Ngoc Phuong Pagoda to attend an annual retreat. All abbots, nuns, laymen, and laywomen belonging to the Mendicant Order of Nuns from the west, south, and central regions gather at Ngoc Phuong Pagoda three times a year to attend traditional ceremonies. February 1 commemorates Master Minh Dang Quang's absence; March 19 is venerable Huynh Lien's death anniversary; and July 15 is the last day of the annual retreat. They also gather for the ordination day of nuns. Nuns are ordained as *śrāmaṇerikā*, *śikṣamāṇā*, and *bhikṣuṇī* under the guidance of the Mendicant Order of Nuns. However, Mendicant nuns receive ordination together with nuns belonging to the Mahāyāna tradition at ordination ceremonies organized by the Vietnam Buddhist Saṅgha.

Besides Huynh Lien, there were other prominent nuns, such as Bach Lien,²¹ Thanh Lien, Kim Lien, Ngan Lien,²² Chon Lien, Quang Lien, Tang Lien, Tri Lien,²³ Duc Lien, and thousands of other nuns who followed the path like these nuns. All Mendicant nuns always feel grateful for the earlier

elder nuns who sacrificed their whole lives to pave the way for the Mendicant Order of Nuns and work for the happiness of living beings. After the late venerable nun Huynh Lien passed away in 1987, Bach Lien (1924-1996) became the chief nun. After her, Tang Lien took charge until she breathed her last in February 2002. At present, Venerable Trang Lien is the chief nun.

The number of Mendicant nuns increases day by day. According to statistics compiled in 1996, out of a total of 11,185 nuns in Vietnam, 9,985 belonged to the Mahāyāna, 200 to the Theravāda, and about 1,000 to the Mendicant Order of Nuns.²⁴ Nowadays there are also many nuns and pagodas belonging to the Mendicant Order of Nuns located in countries such as the United States, Australia, Canada, and so on. At present, hundreds of young nuns are studying at Buddhist Studies colleges in various provinces and at the Vietnam Institutes of Advanced Buddhist Studies in Hue, Hanoi, and Ho Chi Minh City. About 100 Mendicant nuns have received B.A. degrees at the Vietnam Institute of Advanced Buddhist Studies in Hue and Ho Chi Minh City, two nuns have received doctorates at Delhi University, and about 20 nuns are doing M.A., M. Phil., and Ph.D. degrees in Buddhist Studies, education, psychology, and philosophy at Delhi University and Punjab University. About 15 others are studying in China, Myanmar (Burma), and the United States. Many nuns have become great teachers who teach the Dhamma to nuns and laypeople. They are actively engaged in Buddhist activities, contribute enthusiastically to the Vietnamese Buddhist Saṅgha, and perform important duties in the provinces.

Mendicant nuns clearly realize that today's world is rich in many kinds of advanced knowledge, so they focus on the study of Dhamma, and also acquire worldly knowledge in order to catch up with present trends in the world. To adapt to these trends, they aim to perfect their responsibility of leading living beings to a calm and happy life. Although the rituals and traditions of the three Buddhist traditions in Vietnam are different, they all practice the Dhamma and work to perfect the training of the daughters of the Buddha. All propagate the Buddha's teachings to bring equanimity, happiness, welfare, and renunciation to all human beings. The Mendicant Order of Nuns is developing rapidly, and Mendicant nuns have made significant contributions to Vietnamese Buddhism, as well as to the development of Vietnamese society.

NOTES

1. See Han Ôn, *The Dhamma of Minh Dang Quang* (*Minh Dăng Quang Pháp Giáo*, in Vietnamese) (Binh Dinh, 1960), p. 25.
2. Master Minh Dang Quang was caught by Tran Van Soai (Nam Lua) in Can Tho on February 1, 1954, as he traveled from Sadec to Vinh Long and Can Tho. Ibid., p. 40 ff.

3. Thích Giác Trí, *The Formation and Development of the Vietnam Mendicant Saṅgha (Su Hình Thành Và Phát Triển Của Hệ Phái Khất Sĩ)* (The Vietnam Institute of Advanced Buddhist Studies/Học Viện Phật Giáo Việt Nam, 2001), p. 26.
4. *The Formation and Development of the Vietnam Mendicant Saṅgha*, p. 13; and *The Summary of The Dhamma of Minh Dang Quang*, p. 1.
5. Minh Đăng Quang, *Chơn Ly (Truth)* (Hồ Chí Minh City: The Municipal Buddhist Association of Ho Chi Minh City/Thanh Hội Phật Giáo Thanh Phố, 1993).
6. See Ann Heirman, *Rules for Nuns According to the Dharmaguptakavinaya*, Vol. II (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2002); and Thích Giác Nhiên, ed., *Rules and Monastic Principles of the Vietnam Mendicant Saṅgha (Luật Nghi Khất Sĩ)* (Ho Chi Minh City: Minh Đăng Quang Monastery, 1965), pp. 174-99.
7. *The Formation and Development of the Vietnam Mendicant Saṅgha*, p. 13; and *The Summary of The Dhamma of Minh Dang Quang*, p. 1.
8. See William Pruitt (ed.), K.R. Norman (tr.), *The Patimokkha* (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 2001), pp. 113 ff.
9. *The Formation and Development of the Vietnam Mendicant Saṅgha*, p. 14.
10. Ibid., p. 27.
11. Ibid., p. 13.
12. Ibid., p. 27.
13. Ibid., p. 13.
14. Ibid., p. 14.
15. *Rules and Monastic Principles of Vietnam Mendicant Saṅgha*, pp. 109-18.
16. See Thich Nu Tuong Lien, *Vietnamese Buddhist Nuns in the 20th Century* (Delhi: Delhi University Department of Buddhist Studies, 1997), p. 55; and *The Formation and Development of the Vietnam Mendicant Saṅgha*, p. 106.
17. *Vietnamese Buddhist Nuns in the 20th Century*, p. 55.
18. *The Formation and Development of the Vietnam Mendicant Saṅgha*, p. 129 ff.
19. Ibid., p. 111.
20. See Huynh Lien's Disciples, *The Summary Record of the Chief Nun T. N. Huynh Lien* (Ho Chi Minh City: Social Science Publishing House, 1994), p. 15; and *The Formation and Development of the Vietnam Mendicant Saṅgha*, p. 107.
21. *The Formation and Development of the Vietnam Mendicant Saṅgha*, p. 112 ff.
22. Ibid., p. 117 ff.
23. Ibid., p. 121 ff.
24. *Vietnamese Buddhist Nuns in the 20th Century*, p. 74.



Understanding Buddhist Women of Taiwan





Buddhist Women in Taiwan

Chuandao Shih

It is an unexpected honor for a monk to receive an invitation to deliver a talk at the Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women. Presumably, this is the result of my participation in the movement led by Ven. Zhaohui to abolish the Eight Special Rules and my support for the “Declaration of Independence” of the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha in Taiwan.

A popular saying affirms, “Behind every successful man there is certainly a woman.” In the special context of the Taiwanese Buddhist world, we can affirm, “Behind every monk and every Dharma group that has accomplished virtuous deeds, there is certainly the wholehearted contribution of Buddhist women, lay and monastic.” Especially in contemporary Taiwanese Buddhism, outstanding Buddhist women have appeared one after another: doing research, explaining the Dharma, and involved in social engagement. Buddhist women’s achievements are equal to and even surpass the achievements of Buddhist men. Specifically, what roles do Taiwanese Buddhist women play in the overall history of Buddhism in Taiwan and with what capabilities? What changes have they gone through over time? I will discuss the past, present, and future of Buddhist women in Taiwan, from a monk’s perspective.

Buddhist Women in Taiwan: Past and Present

Before the Japanese colonial period, for various reasons, Taiwanese women made close connections with the “vegetarian religion.” Some went to reside in “vegetarian halls” and became “vegetarian women,” where they practiced without taking the tonsure. Others women took refuge in the vegetarian religion and became lifelong lay disciples of this tradition. Although the vegetarian religion has its own scriptures and ceremonies, it also bears a close relationship to the Chan Buddhist school (for instance, the Dragon Flower school). As a

consequence, the vegetarian women resided in nunneries and practiced both the Chan and Pure Land schools.

During the Japanese colonial period (beginning in 1895), the Taiwanese Buddhist Saṅgha went to Yuanquan Temple (Drum Mountain) to receive full ordination. After that, they founded many new Buddhist temples in Taiwan. Due to historical circumstances, these Dharma lineages were gradually recorded as lineages of the Japanese Soto and Rinzai Zen schools. At the same time, some vegetarian women took refuge in orthodox Buddhism. During the Taisho period, all Taiwanese monasteries were able to transmit the monastic precepts. That period also signals the beginning of the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha in Taiwanese Buddhist history. Still, there were more vegetarian women than Buddhist women.

In 1925 Ven. Jueli, the founder of Fayun Temple (Dahu Mountain) organized a series of Dharma lectures for the women disciples of Yishan Hall and requested the Southern Sea Buddhist Association for some locations to give classes to women. In this way, he opened the door of the Dharma to women. Ven. Jueli's efforts not only increased opportunities for women to receive an education in Buddhism, but also led the vegetarian women to transform the "vegetarian hall" into a Buddhist monastery. As a result of this process, an independent consciousness arose in the minds of Buddhist women. These factors, conjoined with the task of spreading the Dharma and the mission of reforming the Taiwanese *bhikṣuṇī* order, resulted in the establishment of Pilu Temple (Houli) and Yuantong Temple (Zhonghe) under the Fayun lineage. It is evident that Buddhist women in Taiwan at that time had already abandoned the practice of retiring from public life and remaining hidden. Instead, they became active in society and were ready to undertake the mission of reforming society. During this period, for the first time, a new generation of Buddhist women chose to attend Buddhist schools in Japan, with an aim to reversing the inferior position Buddhist women occupied, through receiving higher Buddhist education. This new model for nuns was represented by Ven. Ruxue, who founded Faguang Temple and Faguang Buddhist Institute, and by Ven. Tianyi, who assisted Ven. Baisheng in the transmission of Buddhist teachings and precepts.

From 1949, a steady stream of Buddhist monks from mainland China fled to Taiwan. Once in Taiwan, they wandered about homeless. Accused of being bandits, some were arrested and imprisoned. These newly arrived monks were assisted by local Buddhist women, lay and monastic, who offered material support and, in turn, received Buddhist education and Dharma cultivation and training. The result was a new page in the history of Buddhist development in Taiwan. Examples include the assistance offered to Ven. Cihang by Ven. Xuanguang, Ven. Daxin, Ven. Xiuguan and Ven. Ciguan, and the help given

to Ven. Xingyun by nuns such as Ven. Cihui, Ven. Cizhuang, Ven. Cirong, and Ven. Ciyi. Among Buddhist laywomen, Zhang Qingyang was a notable figure, because of her concern for the mainland monks who fled to Taiwan. As a consequence of the phenomenon of nuns assisting monks, the custom of nuns and monks living in the same temple complex in the name of the Dharma began on the island.

The system of precept transmission in Taiwanese Buddhism at that time had been corrupted and widely abused, but after the Japanese occupation a new and pure model for transmitting the ordination was established. At that time, a steady number of vegetarian women were ordained as *bhikṣuṇī*. The first monastic ordination, performed at Daxian Temple in 1953, required the mediation of the nun Yuanrong (from Dongshan Chan Temple) to be recognized by the Chinese Buddhist Association. The nun Tianyi, a brilliant disciple of Ven. Yuanrong, took part in the transmission ceremony and was invited by Ven. Baisheng to give a speech on the *śrāmaṇerikā* precepts. When she transmitted the precepts, Ven. Tianyi received nothing but high esteem from the monks and male novices, even though she was a woman. Ven. Tianyi's lifelong contributions to raising the status of nuns, both in the context of education and precept transmission, cannot be overlooked.

The establishment of Buddhist institutes, which took place after the Japanese occupation, is another accomplishment worth mentioning. In 1948, Ven. Miaoguo, the abbot of Yuanguan Temple, invited Ven. Cihang (who was living in Singapore at that time) to come to Taiwan to give lectures on the Dharma. The effect was to begin a trend among Taiwanese nuns, who began to pursue the study of Dharma. Ven. Yinshun also contributed to the Buddhist education of nuns. At the beginning, he established a "half-day program" at the Fuyan Vihara to enable nuns to obtain a Buddhist education. In 1957, due to the joint efforts of the monk Ven. Yanpei and the nun Ven. Xuanshen (who was the abbess of Yitong temple), he set up the Xinzhu Buddhist Institute for Women. As a consequence, Ven. Yinshun was able to accept female monastic disciples such as Ven. Huiyu, Ven. Huili, and Ven. Huirong. At first Ven. Huirong was the study supervisor at the Buddhist Institute; only later did she become a nun. Taiwanese society at that time was very conservative. As a result, for his efforts to gradually increase the number of female disciples who received Buddhist education, Yinshun experienced quite a lot of pressure and criticism. Nevertheless, after the Japanese occupation he initiated the first phase of education for Buddhist women.

After the 1960's, the Taiwanese economy gradually improved, resulting in social prosperity and improvements in education. Due to increased urbanization, however, many people experienced a sense of alienation and dislocation, and religious beliefs became their only refuge and source of comfort. Fur-

thermore, in 1971 Taiwan withdrew from the United Nations, and exchanges with the United States and Japan were interrupted. As a result, the attentions of Taiwanese society and politics returned to local realities and complexities. In this atmosphere, Taiwanese Buddhism and other new religions spread and developed further.

After that time, the situation of Buddhist women in Taiwan greatly improved, due to higher standards of education, improved economic capabilities, and a sense of independence. Led by the efforts of the nuns, Taiwanese Buddhists gradually became involved in social welfare activities and began to participate in humanitarian campaigns. Some Buddhist women stood out in special ways for their contributions in the fields of education, culture, humanitarian causes, medical care, and social concerns. Among these eminent figures are Ven. Xiaoyun, founder of Huafan University; Ven. Hengqing, professor of philosophy at National Taiwan University; Ven. Huiyan, professor at National Chinghua University; Ven. Zhengyan, founder of Tzuchi Foundation; Ven. Xinzhi, Ven. Wuyin, and Ven. Mingjia, founders of the Buddhist Luminary Institute; and Ven. Zhaohui and Ven. Xingguang of Hongshi Buddhist Institute, who are engaged in defending life and the Buddhist teachings, and are concerned with issues of society, politics, and animal rights. Because of their achievements, these nuns occupy positions on their own merits in the history of Taiwanese Buddhism. Ven. Zhaohui, Ven. Xingguang, and Hongshi Buddhist Institute can be considered as representatives of the so-called “post-Yinshun Era,” due to their efforts to spread and practice “Buddhism for the Human Realm” and Master Yinshun’s thought. If not for these nuns, Buddhism in contemporary Taiwan would lose its distinctiveness.

Buddhist Women in Taiwan: A View Toward the Future

Among Buddhist disciples in Taiwan, women exceed men in number, both among the laity and in monastic communities. According to scholars, the ratio of monks to nuns is 1 to 3. Dr. Jiang Canteng, scholar of the history of Taiwanese Buddhism, states that, “[Nuns] are the main force in Taiwanese monasteries, being in charge of financial affairs and many other tasks. [The fact that nuns outnumber the monks] is a rare religious phenomenon in the history of Buddhism in Asia, and can be understood as the result of Taiwanese local Buddhist culture.” We can conclude that Buddhism in contemporary Taiwan, although apparently run by male monastics, is actually maintained by women.

There is no hiding the fact that the growth and flourishing that characterizes Taiwanese Buddhism today are associated with the great merits of Buddhist women of the past and present. Nevertheless, for the future of Taiwanese Buddhism, lay and monastic Buddhist women must exercise their abilities to

disprove the maxim that says: "The reasons for success are the same reasons as for failure." This matter deserves our attention and discussion.

The distinguishing characteristics of women have always been warmth, grace, the capacity to endure hardships, keen perception, and weak reason. Nonetheless, if Buddhism is carried out in such a way that religious masters and believers neglect the meaning of the Dharma, Buddhism in the future will rely more on people than on Dharma. Moreover, there is a danger that secularization and the promotion of consumerism can win out over wisdom in the world. Although Buddhism is practiced on a large scale and Buddhist educational activities, humanitarian action, and religious practice are all good, if there is no understanding of the Dharma, or if there is understanding without practice, one day the essence and distinctiveness of Buddhism will be lost. There will be Buddhist temples and Buddhist activities, but there will be no Dharma, or something that merely resembles Dharma. This is the biggest crisis that Taiwanese Buddhism faces.

Another crisis of Taiwanese Buddhism originates from the blind support and exaggerated offerings of the laity. This crisis is created by emotions winning out over reason. Grasping at positions of authority and donations is a cause of corruption. That is why sometimes laywomen are not allowed to support the Saṅgha. Sometimes it is not clear whether they are practicing Buddhism or simply pursuing religious idols. Indeed, for each kind of religious master, there is a specific kind of believer, and different kinds of believers create different kinds of Buddhist masters.

I only hope that the steady numbers of monastic and lay Buddhist women take this advice as a mirror, amass their own correct knowledge and correct views, broaden their own insights, and create a future Taiwanese Buddhism that is a realm of nuns. Then, surely, the true Dharma will prevail on earth. This is my sincere advice.





A Perspective on Buddhist Women in Taiwan

Yikong Shih

In recent decades, Buddhism in Taiwan has prospered greatly and seems to have surpassed the heights of the Tang dynasty (618-907 CE). Temples and Buddhist enterprises have been established one by one, and all kinds of activities have been organized to purify people's minds. The number of Buddhists is growing rapidly and Buddhism is becoming a spiritual refuge for people in Taiwan. All of these achievements are accomplished under the guidance of great Buddhist leaders, supported by the devotion and efforts of Buddhist women.

Usually when people talk about Buddhist women, they think of *bhikṣuṇīs* (fully ordained nuns with 348 precepts), *śrāmaṇerikās* (novice nuns with 10 precepts), *śikṣamāṇās* (probationary nuns who are learning the precepts), and *upāsikas* (Buddhist laywomen who practice at home). Here I would like to clarify a few points.

First, the Buddha required his disciples to shave their heads and put on monastic clothing once they joined the Saṅgha. His intention was to eliminate people's misconception about *bhikṣus* (fully ordained monks with 250 precepts) and *bhikṣuṇīs* by having them dress the same. Monastic dress is also a way to uproot the attachments of the ego and to realize the spirit of equality of sentient beings. The spirit of equality and a lifelong ideal to care for sentient beings motivated the Buddha to establish the Saṅgha. The Buddha rejected the caste system in India and proclaimed that all sentient beings are endowed with the Buddha nature. He put into practice the ideal that all beings should be respected equally by allowing the slave Upāli to become a monk before he accepting seven princes into the order. The Buddha also instructed his disciples to teach in dialects that could be understood by all people, rather than

in Sanskrit, a language used only by the elite. This demonstrates the essential universality and equality of Buddhism.

Second, despite their physical differences, *bhikṣuṇīs* and *śrāmaṇerikās* have to undergo the same strict training that *bhikṣus* and *śikṣamāṇās* (novice monks with ten precepts) do, in order to walk the path of the *bodhisattva*. Furthermore, *bhikṣuṇīs* have to observe more precepts than *bhikṣus*. To put the teachings into practice, *bhikṣuṇīs*, like *bhikṣus*, shoulder their responsibilities well by undertaking all kinds of work, such as building, driving, plumbing, maintenance, and so on. In addition, they devote themselves in the tasks of education, culture, charity, and Dharma propagation. Because of their firm aspirations and persistence, they are far more successful than *bhikṣus*. There is one joke in the Buddhist community. The characteristics of *bhikṣus* are described as being “VIP, middle, and front,” referring to the *bhikṣus*’ preference for VIP seats during Dharma functions and activities. *Bhikṣus* sit in the middle of the front row when photos are taken and, when walking, walk in front of others. They are privileged, but shirk their responsibilities.

A newly ordained nun is different from a laywoman. In *Praise to the Bhikṣuṇīs’ Practice and Cultivation*, Ven. Xingyun states that *bhikṣuṇīs* are able to avoid problems such as reprimands from parents-in-law, disturbances from husbands, irritations from children, complaints from sisters-in-law, kitchen drudgery, household chores, worries about daily expenses, and loneliness. In addition, they are able to practice the Dharma joyfully, like great beings, and perfect their cultivation. *Bhikṣuṇīs*’ roles as Dharma teachers are not limited by their gender. Like *bhikṣus*, *bhikṣuṇīs* can devote themselves wholeheartedly and successfully to promoting the Dharma.

Many people wonder why there are so many *bhikṣuṇīs* in Taiwan, and why their numbers and quality are unprecedented in history. After examining this phenomenon, I have concluded that there are several reasons to explain it. First of all, Chinese people traditionally think highly of men, not women. That is why they say, “Having no offspring is the gravest sin with respect to filial piety.” Men have the responsibility to produce a male heir for the family. If a man wishes to become a monk, he suffers more family pressure than a woman.

Second, there are differences between men and women that affect the decision to renounce household life. Men are egocentric and wish to establish their own businesses. Even if they become *bhikṣus*, they are reluctant to be bound by monastic rules. Women are firm and sincere in the pursuit of religious truth. Women are gentle, flexible, and comfortable staying with a group, so they are more likely to settle into monastic life long-term. Once they become *bhikṣuṇīs*, they are less likely to return to lay life than *bhikṣus*.

Third, because of their physiology, women suffer more than men. This inclines women even more toward monastic life. Once they renounce worldly life, they do not have to suffer in childbirth or worry about daily trifles. They can cultivate a life of wisdom for countless sentient beings.

Bhikṣuṇīs and *upāsikas* have played important roles in the development of Buddhism in Taiwan. *Upāsikas* join together to form voluntary groups of devotees that are unprecedented in history. They take part in all kinds of monastic work, such as cooking, serving in the dining hall, receiving guests, and so on. Furthermore, they can become lay Dharma teachers. They can play different roles and contribute greatly to the community and the country. Their contributions deserve further research.





The Inspiration of Ven. Shig Hiu Wan

Xiuci Shi

Friends from all around the world have gathered at Huafan University for the Seventh Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhism Women. The success of this conference can be regarded as a result of the blessings and virtues of Huafan University's founder, Ven. Shig Hiu Wan, my master. I would like to introduce her to all of you.

Ven. Shig Hiu Wan is a patriot both to her country and to Buddhism. During World War II, she spent all of her time painting. She then sold the paintings and donated the money to orphans, so that they could buy mosquito nets and wooden sandals. She also made great contributions to China, by donating money to the military to buy rice for the resistance. At that time, her teacher, Ms. Liang-Chao Han, asked her, "Is there anything I can do for you?" She answered, "I would like to go abroad. I would like to keep painting and I would like to learn more about education in the world." Because she was so interested in education and Mr. Liang was a diplomat at that time, the Master was received as a distinguished guest everywhere she went. She traveled to 28 different countries. After she returned to Hong Kong, she received all friends coming from foreign lands with the same hospitality she remembered enjoying when she traveled abroad.

Because of health problems and the deteriorating security situation in Hong Kong, the Master moved to Taiwan in 1967 and stayed in Famei Yuan for medical treatment. As soon as Mr. Qijun Zhang, the founder of the Chinese Cultural University, found out that the Master was in Taiwan, he invited her to teach there. Ven. Shig Hiu Wan was a diligent teacher, working even on Sundays and holidays. She became a tenured professor at Huagang School and received four awards for teaching at the Chinese Cultural University. In addition to chairing the Graduate Institute of Buddhist Cultural Studies, the

Master also taught in the Philosophy and Arts graduate programs, and served as advisor to the Buddhist Student Association. She was very compassionate toward young people and tried her best to teach them. As a result, many students liked to be close to her. The Master was not only proficient in literature, Buddhism, philosophy, painting, and practice, she was also very liberal-minded and had graceful manners. Every Tuesday evening, the Master led the students in both walking and sitting meditation. On Saturday evenings, she led the students in chanting at the Famei Yuan. On Wednesdays, she was the advisor of a Buddhist study seminar for students that attracted many participants.

Before that time, I had never seen any *bhikṣu* or *bhikṣuṇī* teaching at a university. Ven. Shig Hiu Wan was the very first one. Buddhism was not very popular at that time, and we were truly delighted to see a *bhikṣuṇī* leading so many intellectuals, including both professors and students, in the study of Buddhism. Mr. Zhang asked her to handle all affairs related to Buddhism at the university. Therefore in 1969, upon Mr. Zhang's request and on behalf of the Republic of China, Ven. Hiu Wan participated in the first conference of the International Association of Buddhist Studies, held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. At the conference, she was the only member of the Saṅgha to present a paper, which was truly an honor, both to the country and to Buddhism. Ever since this first conference, Ven. Hiu Wan became one of the most loyal participants in this conference, attending every year. Through these events, she established close friendships with people from around the world.

During one of the IABS conferences, the renowned Japanese scholar Nagao Gadjin stated that Buddhism really existed only in Japan and there was no Buddhism in China and/or Taiwan. After that, Ven. Hiu Wan initiated the International Seminar on Buddhist Education at Yangming Shan. By participating in these seminars, friends from countries around the world have had an opportunity to learn more about Buddhism in Taiwan. After seeing how Buddhism is flourishing in Taiwan, Japanese scholars have been amazed, especially Professor Nagao, who commented, "Saṅgha members in Japan have families, unlike Saṅgha members in Taiwan who practice a celibate lifestyle. Celibacy is an ideal that has been lost for many years in Japan. Hopefully Japan can learn something from Taiwan." In these International Seminars on Buddhist Education, there have also been many local participants from Taiwan, including monk scholars like Ven. Shengyen, Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, and representatives from many Taiwanese temples and countries around the world.

The establishment of the Lotus Ashram by Ven. Hiu Wan was a result of my request. I was very impressed by all the wonderful work the Master had done and I thought it would be a great shame if she did not establish a Buddhist college. I was young and eager to learn. Therefore, I begged the Master to start a college and teach us, pledging that we would be responsible for all

our own living costs and other expenses. The Master kindly agreed and began teaching us, using space provided by Yongming Temple in the Yangming Shan area. In the beginning, there were only six students and we could only continue if the college proved to be a success. The students proved to be diligent and very well behaved. The Lotus Ashram never tried to recruit students, but people heard about the college and came to join. As a result, the number of students increased continuously. The Master was very strict and yet very kind to all students. The Master taught both at the Chinese Cultural University and Yongming Temple, and so she educated many young people for temples throughout Taiwan. The students who graduated from the Lotus Ashram have all become very accomplished, which made their teachers very happy.

In addition to establishing a Buddhist college focusing on practice, the Master always hoped to reach the general public by starting a university in the community. After a long search, during which she checked out 32 different locations, she finally found an ideal place. In order to show their gratitude for the Master's teachings, students and their parents arranged to have a fund-raising event in Singapore. At that event, the Master's paintings were sold to generate funds to purchase the land, and an application to build a university in Taiwan was submitted to the government. Everyone worked very hard at that time. Groups of students and disciples tried everything to help raise funds for the university. I went through the streets with an alms bowl asking for donations from people, and even the Master herself, already in her 70s, worked day and night on the plans and the application to establish the university. All the while, she continued to teach at the Lotus Ashram, kindly shouldering all the responsibilities and difficulties by herself. The Master called herself an "old buffalo," the rest of us teachers "middle-aged buffalos," and the students "young buffalos." We all plowed the fields together.

Finally in 1980, the Huafan College of Engineering and Technology was established. All the building plans, first for the Lotus Ashram and eventually for Huafan University, were created by the Master herself. We did not hire any landscape designer either, because designs made by other people would not necessarily meet our needs. The Master herself is an artist, so using her designs, the university naturally became a piece of art, permeated throughout by a spiritual atmosphere.

The Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women could take place at Huafan University because the Master always welcomed friends from countries far and wide, and wants everyone to be treated well here. Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo (Huikong) came to Taiwan in 1982 to receive ordination and stayed at the Lotus Ashram for half a year after her ordination. The Master taught her very strictly and with great kindness, and she has continued to follow the Master's teachings and the *bodhisattva* path. She established education

programs for women in the Himalayan mountains and began the Sakyadhita International Conferences on Buddhist Women. She wrote to the Master and invited her to the first Sakyadhita conference in Bodhgaya in 1987, so the Master sent Ven. Renhua to India to participate in the conference. Later, when the conference was held in Bangkok, the Master traveled with some graduate students from the Buddhist College at Huaan University to participate in the conference.

When Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo wrote to the Master two years ago and asked whether the conference could be hosted by Huaan University, the Master asked the teachers at the Lotus Ashram for their opinions. As teachers, we were all very happy to hear the news and promised to help with the organization of the conference. How time flies. Today, after two years, following a series of other activities, including summer camps for high school students and elementary school students as well as the International Seminar on Buddhist Education, we are able to host this conference. Following the conference, we will also have scheduled a major chanting assembly in August, a summer camp for entrepreneurs, a camp on religion and peace, and many other Dharma activities scheduled here at Huaan University.

Ven. Hui Wan has made great contributions to Buddhism. She was the very first *bhikṣuṇī* ever to teach and chair a graduate program in a university and participate in an international academic conference. She was also the first *bhikṣuṇī* to hold an international seminar on Buddhist education, to establish an institute for graduate studies in Buddhism, and to organize Buddhist art exhibitions. Moreover, she was the very first *bhikṣuṇī* to establish a Buddhist university for the general public in Taiwan.

The Master has always been humble, quietly working very hard, and shouldering the responsibilities all by herself. She always teaches the students, saying, “Do not compete for the road with people in the intersection.” Therefore, as the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* says, “Fearing neither hard work nor hardships, my only wish is that all sentient beings escape from suffering and obtain happiness.” This is exactly what the Master has been doing all these years. No matter how busy she is, the Master finds time to continue her publication activities, including poetry, painting, Buddhist studies, travelogues, and literature. We always say that, under the Master’s leadership, we can sing, paint, and learn things that can never be exhausted in an entire lifetime.



Buddhism and Soft Power

Hsiu-Lien Annette Lu

It is my distinct honor to attend the opening ceremony of the Seventh Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women. I would like to convey my sincere wishes for the success of this conference, and my heartfelt respect for your contributions to human beings, as well as to world peace.

Buddhism is one of the oldest religions in the world. It is flourishing in our country perhaps more than anywhere else in the world. Of the 23 million people in Taiwan, 93 percent are Buddhists. The Buddhists of Taiwan are among the most progressive and active in the world, contributing their energies to charities and establishment of moral values. Here you will see how the Buddhist tradition has blended well with a modern, industrialized society. Today's Taiwan is the sixteenth largest trading nation in the world and is the fourth largest exporter of IT produces. The average income, calculated in terms of purchasing power parity, has reached US \$20,000 whereas fifty years ago it was \$150. Buddhists in Taiwan are active and well-known for their contributions to social-welfare, education, and charity projects. We have 35 Buddhist seminaries, five Buddhist universities, and three Buddhist colleges, as well as Buddhist high schools, orphanages, retirement homes, hospitals, libraries, and publishing houses. Tsu-chi Foundation, a Buddhist charity group led by Master Cheng Yen, has established ongoing relief programs around the world.

These achievements have been accompanied by tremendous progress on gender equality. As the founder of the women's movement in Taiwan, I am glad to share with you my experiences in fighting against chauvinistic traditions and gender prejudice. I was born on June 6, 1944, the day during World War II when the Allied forces landed in Normandy, France. I was the youngest girl in a poor family. When I was little, I was almost given away to other families to be raised, a common practice due to the rampant poverty in Taiwan at the time. Gradually my parents changed their attitude and decided to educate me

as they educated my brother, who graduated from law school and became a successful lawyer. When I graduated from high school, I passed the entrance examination and went to the Law School of National Taiwan University. Later I was awarded a prestigious scholarship that allowed me to go to the United States to continue graduate studies. I received two law degrees, one from the University of Illinois and the other from Harvard.

When I returned to Taiwan in the early 1970s, I was surprised to find that the society was debating whether universities should set up certain barriers to prevent girls from entering colleges. As more and more girls passed the highly competitive entrance examination and entered college, people were considering whether it was waste of educational resources to have too many girls in college. The dominant view at that time was that women, no matter how much education they had received, were supposed to find a good husband and spend the rest of their lives taking care of husband and children. To fight against such traditional prejudices against women, I started writing articles and giving speeches to advocate for women's rights. I believed that prosperity and harmony for both sexes should be based on gender equality, and that all women should be granted equal opportunity to develop an independent character and self-respect. The campaign, which I called "New Feminism," triggered a series of women's movements that opposed gender inequality and discrimination throughout Taiwan. In 1979, I was arrested by the authoritarian government for giving a 20-minute speech at a peaceful rally to commemorate International Human Rights Day. The military court charged me with sedition and sentenced me to 12 years in prison, along with seven other activists advocating human rights.

Many changes have taken places since I launched the New Feminism thirty years ago. In Taiwan today, women have the right to vote, to receive education, and to freely choose their lives. Women are heading large corporations, hospitals, universities, and monasteries. More significantly, many women leaders have moved a step forward to run for political office. In our national legislature, 50 members – 23 percent – are women. In the Taipei City Council, about one third of the members, including the speaker of the Council, are women. As women become more independent and confident, a new challenge for female leaders is not just protecting women's rights, but contributing to women's peace-loving nature to create a more lovely and just world. Most of the time in human history, political power and economic resources have been dominated by men. This male-dominated world, however, has always been full of wars, corruption, and poverty. The truth is that over 99 percent of wars in human history were initiated by male leaders, yet all the victims of wars are women's beloved husbands and sons, if not themselves. To men, power and authority is the ultimate goal in politics, and war has always been their favorite

tool to solve conflicts with others. Women are different. The world has been chaotic because of women's absence and silence. As creators of life, women are bound to cherish all living beings on earth. Women's motherly nature makes us faithful supporters of world peace.

Our peace-loving nature makes us the real inheritors of Buddhism. There are over 600 million Buddhists in the world today, but Taiwan is one of only three traditions (with Korea and Vietnam) in which women are granted full monastic ordination. Nuns and laywomen are taking leading roles in many temples and seminaries. Their achievements reveal that women are making great contributions for the development of the religion.

The Sakyadhita Conference in Taiwan is a wonderful opportunity for Buddhist women around the world to get together to discuss the issues that deeply concern all Buddhists. As a Buddhist, I always take the Buddha's teachings, especially compassion and wisdom for all living creatures, as my maxim. The philosophy of love and sharing, which I call "soft power," has guided me as a pioneer of the women's movement, a fighter for freedom and democracy, and even in the darkness of prison. I spent six years there until the government released me on medical parole in 1985.

I believe that "soft power" is compatible with the benevolent and peaceful nature of Buddhism. The idea consists of five key elements: human rights, democracy, peace, love, and technological progress. It contrasts sharply with the notion of "hard power," which is based on exploitative materialism and aggressive militarism. Hard power, with its heartless and mechanical approach, ignores humane values and misleads nations toward over-centralization of state power and even military hegemony. It is aggressive and destructive. Soft power, in contrast, makes use of mercy and wisdom to fight against corruption, poverty, and injustice. It is constructive and generous. The universal values of democracy, human rights, peace, and love are all important factors impelling society toward a state of co-existence and co-prosperity. Advanced technology in this new era should also be aimed at serving rather than enslaving humans, making the "symbiosis" between people, and between human beings and the environment a vital priority. Without love and compassion, science can be utilized to exploit our resources and environment. Soft power is an ideal concept for Buddhist to transform an unjust, aggressive, and disastrous world.

In the next few days, you will fully experience the hospitality and friendship of the Taiwanese people. You will see how traditional Buddhist culture has been preserved and rejuvenated in our society. Most importantly, please open your mind to feel how we may use "soft power" to nurture this beautiful island. I hope you will have a fruitful and unforgettable experience in Taiwan. Thank you.



The Development of the Bhikṣuṇī Order

*Tzu Jung Shih*¹

All sentient beings in the universe, whether they are intelligent or dim-witted, virtuous or corrupt, rich or poor, are either male or female in gender. Women especially tend to form close relationships. Everyone, whether male or female, all grow within their mother's womb. Without mothers, there would be no birth. Thus, the mother is the original source of life.

The World's Concept of Women

China and the West seem to have different views about women. The West regards women as spiritually pure and transcendental guardians, like Venus, who symbolizes love. Women are portrayed as angels. By contrast, in Chinese thought women are poisonous like snakes or cobras, mischievous like foxes, or possessive like mother tigers. Women ruin countries and are polluted. In the past, men considered women vile. In feudal society, people respected men and derided women. Women were considered inauspicious. Both at home and in society, it could be said that women had no rights.

However, since early times there have been women – regardless of their abilities, intelligence, and other aptitudes – who not only surpassed men, but also were considered heroes. This is documented in Chinese historical records. For example, during the Tang Dynasty, Wu Zhitian was the first female emperor in Chinese history. In the Han dynasty, Ban Zhao completed the history book begun by her father and brother. In the Song Dynasty, Liang Hongyu protected the country along with her husband. All of these women were historically unique figures. Many women have become internationally famous, such as Queen Elizabeth and Margaret Thatcher of England and Sonia Gandhi of India. The leader of the opposition party in Sri Lanka, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, was the world's first and most famous democratically elected

female president. Megawati Sukarnaputri became the president of Indonesia and Cory Aquino became president of the Philippines. Women do a thousand things, from politics to law to conflict resolution, never falling behind men. Because women have had such positions of power, they can never be considered second class citizens or stripped of all honor and respect.

In Mahāyāna Buddhism, it is asserted that all sentient beings have Buddha nature. Considered from this perspective, women deserve respect. Women's intelligence and abilities are not second to men's. Women have the right and responsibility to participate in the public sphere and be given opportunities to serve in every aspect of society. Women's warm hearts, compassion, and honesty are not secondary to men's. They should develop their gentleness, tolerance, attentiveness, industriousness, strength of character, and other qualities, just like the bodhisattva Guanyin, who used compassion and beauty to grace the world. From the beginning, this world's population has been half male and half female. In a civilized society, men should respect women's rights and promote equal rights between men and women. Women should oppose careers that threaten the dignity of women, such as prostitution and so on.

In sum, Buddhism advocates, first, that women have equal rights; second, that women have rights to participation; third, that women have the right to self-determination; and fourth, that women have the right to be respected. The Buddhist view of women's rights was originally influenced by the customs of the times, but we no longer need to follow this. Not only are many of these practices contrary to the Buddha's intentions, but they are also not compatible with modern society.

Interactions Between the Male and Female Buddhist Orders

In the fifth year after the Buddha attained Buddhahood, when the Buddha's father died, Mahāprajāpatī (his aunt) and Yashodara (his wife) became disciples of the Buddha and led 500 daughters of the Buddha (*sākyadhitā*) to ask to become monastics, which was the beginning of the *bhikkhūnī* order. The Buddha himself established the *bhikkhūnī* order 2600 years ago. The *bhikkhūnī* order has been transmitted until the present day and *bhikkhūnīs* have spread the Dharma throughout the world. Outstanding *bhikkhūnīs* are always coming forth: some of them humbly and silently do their jobs for the benefit of human beings while others perform the difficult task of spreading the Dharma publicly. Within the Saṅgha, each has her special skill, so *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhūnīs* are like two wings of a bird or the two feet human beings stand on; one cannot exist without the other.

However, for the past two thousand years, there has been a controversy surrounding the Eight Special Rules. Some *bhikkhus* refer to the Buddhist system

of the Eight Special Rules and demand that *bhikṣuṇīs* “respectfully prostrate” to *bhikṣus*. They do not allow *bhikṣuṇīs* to “speak of the faults of *bhikṣus*,” and so forth. Those who oppose the Eight Special Rules say that these rules are not compatible with the ideas of the Buddha and that the institution of rules “depends on causes and conditions.” They doubt that these eight rules are the Buddha’s original thought.

Do we need to discuss whether the Eight Special Rules derive from the Buddha or not? Let us first address the issue of *bhikṣuṇīs* being unable to talk about the faults of the *bhikṣus*. According to “the Four Rules of the Vinaya”, at one time Mahāprajāpatī went to the Buddha and spoke of the faults of the group of six *bhikṣus*. Not only did the Buddha not prevent her from discussing their faults, in fact, he admonished the six *bhikṣus*.

According to the *Agama Sūtra*, Mahāprajāpatī also went to the Buddha to ask that he eliminate the law that “*bhikṣuṇīs* must respect *bhikṣus*” and change it so that after *bhikṣuṇīs* take full ordination, the young *bhikṣus* pay respect to the senior *bhikṣuṇīs*. At that time, the Buddha did not explicitly respond, but since everything follows causes and conditions, the Buddha told the *bhikṣuṇīs* to meditate according to *vipassana* to encourage all the *bhikṣuṇīs* to “consider emptiness and enter nirvana” in order to promote their practice. He also spoke of the *bhikṣuṇī* Mahāprajāpatī, how she eliminated bad habits, conformed her behavior to that of men, and whose virtues could be modeled for the monastics.

Actually, the Buddha’s teachings originally said “depend on the Dharma, do not depend on humans.” Before the Buddhist dharma, these were equal: neither was above the other. In fact, the Eight Rules systematized by the Buddha enabled female nuns to be accepted by a conservative Indian society. Because at that time the *bhikṣu* order had already been established, they were unwilling to abandon their “higher position above *bhikṣuṇīs*” and its resulting benefit. Thus Buddhism’s Eight Rules found little opposition among the *bhikṣus*.

Moreover, most of those who followed Mahāprajāpatī were nobility (queens and princesses). The Buddha feared that the noble *bhikṣuṇīs* would look down upon common *bhikṣus*, thus he instituted the precepts. On the other hand, because the *bhikṣuṇī* order was just established, in order to cultivate and protect the female Saṅgha, he deliberately had the *bhikṣus* take responsibility for educating the *bhikṣuṇīs*. At the same time he was also concerned about the dangers of *bhikṣuṇīs* going out searching for food, thus he established a rule that *bhikṣuṇīs* could not live separate from the *bhikṣus*.

After the Buddha entered *parinirvāṇa* the *sūtras* and commentaries were collected and explained by *bhikṣus*. Thus some rules appeared that opposed *bhikṣuṇīs*, such as “Women are impure,” “Women have five obstacles,” and

“Women cannot become Buddhas.” Actually, for both men and women, purity and pollution are in the mind and are not external appearances. Moreover, the Buddha said that all sentient beings have Buddha nature, the potential for enlightenment. Buddha nature has no male or female, so why should we attach ourselves to external appearances?

When we consider the Mahāyāna *sūtras*, we see that the Buddha gave many lectures to women about becoming enlightened. For instance, in the *Agama Sūtra* the Buddha taught 500 *bhikṣuṇīs* who attained the first level. In the *Sūtra of the Dragon King’s Daughter*, a chapter discusses how women can become Buddhas.

In the *Ratnakuta Sūtra*, after Sariputra doubts the ability of women to change their bodies, a woman named Wuweide transforms her body into that of a man and makes the vow: “The Dharma has neither male nor female, thus I can now transform myself into a man.” After saying this, she immediately changes from a woman to a man. The Buddha confirms that she has a *bhikṣu*’s body and she later becomes a woman again, to show that the Dharma has no fixed appearance.

In the *Lotus Sūtra*, Sariputra assumes that women have such polluted bodies that they cannot become Buddhas, so an eight-year-old dragon girl transforms her body and momentarily became a Buddha. Thus we see that all sentient beings originally have Buddha nature. Everyone can become a Buddha. In Buddhism one cannot use gender to distinguish the level of a person’s virtue, nor can one use age to measure one’s wisdom. It is only humans that want to distinguish according to illusory external appearances. The *Diamond Sūtra* says it most clearly: “The appearances of the ordinary world are all empty. If one knows that external appearances are not appearances, one can see the true face of the Tathāgatha.” One can see that external appearances are not fundamental. The most important thing is for men and women to mutually respect and benefit one another, so that the world can become harmonious.

The Contributions of Contemporary Bhikṣuṇīs

Among the founders of the world’s religions, the Buddha established a female monastic order. By establishing the *bhikṣuṇīs* order, the Buddha identified an important aspect of equality, along with his statement, “From four castes, one can become the same Buddha.” Not only do these expressions of human equality have a special significance in Buddhist history, but they also has extraordinary value for the history of the world’s religions and the history of human civilization.

The *Agamas*, *Vinaya*, and other *sūtra* record the lives of many *bhikṣuṇīs* and speak about their dissemination of the Dharma and other activities. The

Sūtra of the Buddha Telling About Arahats Endowed with Virtue records ten *bhikṣuṇīs* who were famous disciples of the Buddha. The *Therīgāthā* mentions how 73 senior *arhat bhikṣuṇīs* entered *nirvāṇa* and used poetry to record their brief biographies. Among these *bhikṣuṇīs*, 24 were princesses or belonged to the nobility.

Emperor Aśoka, the benevolent ruler who enriched the world, spread the Dharma to many countries. Many people from noble families became monastics, including the emperor's own daughter, the princess Saṅghamitra. Afterwards Anula, a queen in Sri Lanka, also wanted to create a pure mind and become a monastic, so the daughter of King Aśoka, Saṅghamitra, helped her attain her goal. Saṅghamitra led eleven senior *bhikṣuṇīs* and she offered the king of Sri Lanka a branch from the *bodhi* tree where the Buddha became enlightened. Under her guidance, Queen Anula and 500 women received full *bhikṣuṇīs* ordination. The *bhikṣuṇīs* in Sri Lanka used their influence to spread the Dharma.

The Chinese *bhikṣuṇī* order was established during the Eastern Jin dynasty. The first nun was Jingjian, who took the ten precepts under the guidance of her master, Zhishan, took the ten precepts. Forty years later, the Jingjian and 23 other people received full *bhikṣuṇī* ordination. The group resided peacefully at Zhulin temple in Luoyang under the leadership of Jingjian. She used a gentle way to help people live together harmoniously. Her lectures were very useful; thus, she was well respected.

From the Eastern and Western Jin Dynasties to the Tang and Song Dynasties and up until the present day, many people among the literati and nobility became monastics, due to the spread of the Dharma to China. During the seventy years between the Eastern and Western Jin, Dynasties, the *bhikṣuṇī* order was first established. Among the early *bhikṣuṇīs*, Tanbei, Zhixian, Huizhan, Zhimiaoyin, and others became quite famous and received the respect of the emperor. During the 150 years between the Southern and Northern Six Dynasties, the *bhikṣuṇī* order developed quickly. The smaller temples had about one hundred residents, while larger ones had over a thousand. Many temples received the patronage of emperors and high officials and there were many famous *bhikṣuṇī*. During the Sui, Tang, and Song dynasties, Buddhism became more common among all levels of society and intelligent, powerful *bhikṣuṇīs* became well known. For example, during the Eastern Jin Dynasty, Bhikṣuṇī Anling led the *bhikṣuṇī* order, during the Six Dynasties period the great Master Faxian worked to spread the Dharma east of Zhejiang; during the Sui Dynasty, Master Juexian wanted to teach the emperor of the Sui Dynasty emperor to follow the Dharma, and the Tang Dynasty master Zhishou went to Japan to spread the Vinaya. Master Facheng translated *sūtras* so that the Dharma might last thousands of years, Bhikṣuṇī Wujinzang pre-

dicted that Master Huineng would become a great monk, and Master Ruyuan always worked hard at the Zen and Vinaya. During the Song Dynasty, Fan-zhen continuously carved the Taishou canon, and during the Yuan Dynasty Zhengjing was the teacher of the emperor and the queen. During the Qing Dynasty Master Wuweixiaoshanni cured illnesses by “modifying the treatment according to the illness.”

Between the end of the Qing Dynasty and the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the spread of the Buddhadharma was obstructed because of the chaos of war, but a few great masters who went from China to Taiwan, which is why Taiwanese Buddhism has flourished. Today, Taiwanese *bhikṣuṇīs* have become foremost in the world. *Bhikṣuṇīs* have spread the Dharma all over the world and have founded a new age, surpassing the accomplishments of nuns in previous centuries. From February 15 to 23, 1998, Foguangshan organized an international full ordination ceremony in Bodhgaya, India. In total, more than a hundred people came from 23 countries around the world seeking *bhikṣuṇī* ordination. Among them were forty excellent nuns from Sri Lanka. This was the first time in history that these international Buddhist orders gathered in Bodhgaya, the place where the Buddha achieved awakening, for such an event. The ordination marked a new page in world history.

In the Chinese tradition, there are many famous contemporary *bhikṣuṇīs*. For example in mainland China, Master Tongyuan graduated from Beijing University and tried to spread the Vinaya. Venerable Hongding suffered a life of hardship and, after her cremation, relics the size of olives were found. In Taiwan, Ven. Miaoran and Ven. Yuanrong received full ordination and Ven. Ruxue constructed a monastery and founded a Buddhist institute. To spread Chinese Buddhism internationally, Ven. Tzu Chuang constructed temples all over the world. Ven. Tzu Hui took responsibility for Buddhist education and culture and established Hsi Lai University, Nan Hua University, and Fo Guang University. Ven. Tzu Yi compiled the *Fo Guang Encyclopedia* and Ven. Xiaoyun established Huafan University. Ven. Yifa has a Ph.D. from Yale and lectures at Harvard University and Hsi Lai University. Ven. Heng-Ching teaches at National Taiwan University and Ven. Huiyan teaches at Zhongxin University. Ven. Dahe received a Ph.D. Komazawa University in Japan, Ven. Yi Kung received a Ph.D. from Taiwan Normal University; Ven. Yi Yu received a Ph.D. from Aichi University in Japan, and Ven. Yong You received a Ph.D. from the Universities of London and Oxford. Ven. Wuyin established the Luminary Buddhist Institute for the education and training of *bhikṣuṇīs*, Ven. Zhengyan established the charitable organization Ciji, and Ven. Zhao-hui fervently protects the Dharma. These women represent the virtuous and educated *bhikṣuṇīs* of the world.

In addition, there are excellent *bhikṣuṇīs* from all over the world. There are several examples: Tibet supports both men and women in the Saṅgha and Dorje Pagmo was a recognized reincarnate lama of high status. Bhik-khuni Dharmananda from Thailand received full ordination and Sri Lanka extols Sudharmacari as “the light of Sri Lankan women.” Because of her hard work, she worked for the establishment of an order of nuns, despite the fact that highly placed *bhikṣus* oppose the reestablishment of the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha. In Singapore, Ven. Guangpin established a Buddhist institute for women. In the Philippines, Ven. Guangren created a clinic that benefits over 100,000 people. In Korea, Ven. Guangyu became president of the Korean Bhikṣuṇī Association. In Canada, Pema Chodron is a *bhikṣuṇī* who spreads the Dharma throughout North America. From the United States, Karma Lekshe Tsomo established Sakyadhita, the International Buddhist Women’s Association. From Germany, Prabhasa Dharma was a *bhikṣuṇī* who spread Chan to Europe. In Japan, a nun who lost both of her hands, Rev. Dashi Shunjiao, was so determined that she put forth great effort and, using her neck, wrote a portion of the *Heart Sūtra*, which the Japanese call the “*Handless Heart Sūtra*” and regard as a national treasure.

From the beginning of the *bhikṣuṇī* order, regardless of time or place, excellent *bhikṣuṇīs* of the Saṅgha have taught the Dharma, spread the Dharma, published books about the Dharma, and used their compassion to benefit society by establishing temples to benefit all sentient beings and make Buddhism bloom again.

The Future of the Bhikṣuṇīs

From the time when the Buddha established the *bhikṣuṇī* order, the Buddha did not make definite decisions about the relationships between *bhikṣus* and *bhikṣuṇīs*. For example, the Tang Dynasty Chan Master *Baizhang Huaihai* was unable to change the Buddhist system, so he simply acted in accordance with the customs of his time. He established new rules for monasteries; instead of changing the rules and precepts, he created new paths that enabled Chinese Buddhism to develop even more fully.

Regarding the Eight Special Rules, the Buddha did not establish a completely fixed system. In the Vinaya, a passage says, “the small rules can be discarded.” Monastic procedures regarding food, clothing, money, eating after noon, and other rules already differ from what the Buddha established. Thus, while we do not intend to abandon the eight rules, in time, they will no longer be observed and will no longer be transmitted.

Although there are some who believe that the eight rules cannot be changed because we must appease the *bhikṣus*, the results will definitely be

the opposite. Clearly the *bhikṣus* themselves cannot uphold the precepts entirely. A *bhikṣu* deserves respect because he has a good education, is virtuous, or excels in practice, not because of the eight rules that force others to show him respect.

Therefore, I have four suggestions for the future direction of the *bhikṣuṇīs*:

1. *Gender equality.* If future *bhikṣuṇīs* want to be respected, they should first cultivate their own virtue and character by eliminating pride and arrogance, being virtuous, taking responsibility, lecturing on the Dharma, practicing compassion, having vision, and realizing their goals. Once women have these qualities, men and women will naturally become equals.

2. *Develop institutions.* In the past, women always put their mind and strength into building temples and giving offerings. If the *bhikṣuṇīs* now want to leave the monastery, they must be the same as men. They should teach and spread the Dharma. If they have their own institutions, they will naturally receive people's respect. We can see this in Ven. Zhengyan's Ciji charitable organization, which has received the world's respect.

3. *Saṅgha organization.* Once the two Saṅghas mutually respect one another, the organization will be complete. Once there is an organization, *bhikṣuṇīs* will naturally grow in strength. At Foguangshan, *bhikṣuṇīs* are evaluated with regard to the progress of their educational institutions and practice, which helps to maintain certain standards. With certain nuns recognized as organizational leaders, the members naturally interact harmoniously.

4. *Spreading education.* Women tend to be caring and compassionate, so they tend to be successful in Buddhist practice. Men tend to be more open-minded, thoughtful, and wise. As education becomes more commonly available and women are able to receive an education, they will be able to give lectures and write, and will not have to depend on a few people to support the entire group. Therefore spreading education is an important goal for the female Saṅgha.

To face the twenty-first century, Buddhists must go among the people. Buddhism and life cannot be separated. This is an age when true Buddhist followers can come together. Buddhists can come together from many countries to collaborate and quickly establish an international *bhikṣu* and *bhikṣuṇīs* orders. At the same time, men and women from these countries should seek to establish a complete and perfect community of *bhikṣu*, *bhikṣuṇīs*, *upāsakas*, and *upāsikās* cooperating together. Together they can promote world peace and enable all humankind to share in the benefits of the Dharma. Together they can create happy, peaceful, and prosperous lives. Together they can attain world peace and harmony.

NOTES

1. I am grateful to Ven. Master Xingyun for advice on this paper.





The Future of Buddhism in Taiwan: The Perspective of a Senior Female Volunteer

Rong-Zhi Lin

Amitofo to you all. I feel very honored to be present at this Seventh Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women. On behalf of the Buddhist community in Taiwan, I would like to take this opportunity to welcome all the conference participants, venerable *bhikṣuṇīs*, and respected Buddhist disciples from all over the world.

As I received the invitation to speak at this conference in a great rush, I would like to apologize for this abrupt visit. Especially, I understand that all of you have been sitting for quite some time, so I will try to keep my talk as short as possible. I would like to focus on sharing my understanding of the problems faced by Buddhist women in Taiwan from the perspective, having worked as a volunteer in the local Buddhist community for 28 years.

Although many speakers have identified various *bhikṣuṇīs* and have mentioned that some of the Taiwanese *bhikṣuṇīs* who enjoy international recognition, I would like to add my personal testimony and share with you some of the contributions that *bhikṣuṇīs* in Taiwan have made to the local Buddhist community. Senior *bhikṣuṇīs* during the early days, such as Ven. Bhikṣuṇī Zhidao in Miaoli, Ven. Bhikṣuṇī Xiuhui in Xinzhu, Ven. Bhikṣuṇī Tianji in Pingdong, and Ven. Shaohong in Taidong, and *bhikṣuṇīs* in the present day, such as Ven. Bhikṣuṇī Dawen in Xinzhu and Ven. Bhikṣuṇī Ruqin, and so on, all deserve mention. Without their persistence and long-term contributions, branches of Buddhist organizations in various cities and counties in Taiwan would never have come into being. Although, according to the bylaws of the Chinese Buddhist Association, only *bhikṣus* can hold positions as chairpersons, yet without the support and sacrifice of *bhikṣuṇīs* from behind the scenes, the Buddhist or-

ganizations in Taiwan would not enjoy the solid foundation that they do today.

Currently, *bhikṣuṇīs* in Taiwan can take positions as branch chairpersons. Also, the Taiwan Bhikṣuṇī Association initiated by Venerable Jingding is one of around forty Buddhist organizations that are operating nationwide. In a word, Taiwanese *bhikṣuṇīs* have always been an integral part of the functioning of Buddhist organizations in Taiwan. The contributions of Taiwanese *bhikṣuṇīs* to Buddhism in Taiwan have been neglected in the past, and that is why I must repeatedly emphasize their contributions. For example, two-thirds are the temples in the Chinese Buddhist Temple Association are headed by venerable *bhikṣuṇīs* and they have supported the association consistently. As the core of the Taiwanese Buddhist community, the contributions of Taiwanese *bhikṣuṇīs* to Taiwan's Buddhist organizations cannot be ignored.

Next, I would like to address issues related to the differences between lay and ordained groups. So far, we have noted the leadership of *bhikṣuṇīs* in Taiwan and there is no doubt that the *bhikṣuṇīs* of Taiwan have amply demonstrated their abilities in organizing Buddhists and leading their temples. It is doubtful that laywomen in Taiwan have been equally aware or conscious. Embarrassingly, I must admit that laywomen in Taiwan may lack such self-awareness. This conference is a good example. Sakyadhita is holding this large-scale activity in Taiwan, yet few Taiwanese Buddhist laywomen are involved. I myself feel very guilty. The participation from the universities seems to be much greater than from the Buddhist community itself. Professors such as Dr. Yuchen Li, Dr. Yuling Chang, and Dr. Elise DeVido have been extremely busy with the preparations for the conference, on top of being really busy with their own academic endeavors. If Taiwanese Buddhist laywomen from major Buddhist groups such as Tzu-chi Foundation had been more involved, they could have lent their hands and made the work much easier for the organizers. Therefore, I feel that Taiwanese Buddhist laywomen should feel apologetic about their inadequacies and try to catch up. Here I would like to call attention to this and hope that all the respected monastics here will help educate their disciples back home.

Third, I would also like to touch upon gender issues, which have already been mentioned by several speakers. As a laywoman, I have had contact with the Saṅgha, both the Bhikṣu Saṅgha and the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha, much more than most other laypeople do. For instance, when the issue of the eight special rules was first mentioned and discussed, many venerable *bhikṣus* told me that this problem never existed and should not even be considered a problem in Taiwan. As a laywoman, I am not supposed to participate in discussions about the relationship between *bhikṣus* and *bhikṣuṇīs*, and I will not address an issue like this. However, in a democratic era like today, any problems in any religious tradition should be open for discussion. This does not necessarily mean that

there is a lack of respect for the religion being discussed, because we can use skillful means to address the issues. Moreover, these issues have to do with communication problems between generations and between the two genders. These are issues that are similarly being discussed in the Catholic and Protestant Christian communities. I know this because I have meetings with people of different religions all the time. But someone has to stand up and have the courage it takes to initiate such communications and discussions.

With regards to gender issues in Taiwan, I personally admire Venerable Xingyun of Foguangshan very much. In my 28 years of service, the major role I have played has been to seek legal assistance from government legislators for temples in Taiwan and prevent any unfair treatment to Buddhist temples. Therefore, whenever there are any legal issues related to Buddhist temples in Taiwan, you will see that I appear in the news media. In situations like these, I sometimes feel pressure from both ordained and lay Buddhists groups sometimes. The pressure does not really come from the Saṅgha, but from myself. As a Buddhist, I have to be aware of my own position. For example, in a conference like this today, according to the hierarchical structure between the ordained and lay groups in the Buddhist community, it seems inappropriate for me to be speaking here on the stage. Nevertheless, I believe that as long as I respect Buddhism, as all Saṅgha members do, my presence here could be understood.

When I mentioned respect for Buddhism I said that I also respected Venerable Xingyun. The reason why I said I respected him was not because of any favorable treatment I had received from him personally, but because of his attitude toward people. Among the six members for the Consulting Committee of Religious Regulations under the Ministry of Internal Affairs, I am the only representative from the Buddhist community. Therefore, I was under great pressure when we were dealing with the laws for religious organizations in Taiwan. Whether such laws make sense or not is a separate matter. The mere fact that I was involved has drawn great attention from all different parties. Nevertheless, last year when Venerable Xingyun invited me to go to Foguangshan to explain the laws to 180 some executive personnel (including venerable *bhikṣus* and *bhikṣuṇīs*) there, he showed his willingness to understand my efforts, and he also showed his respect for professionals. At least, he was willing to give me an opportunity to tell them what the laws were about and he was willing to listen to my suggestions. It happens very often that there exist various voices inside the Buddhist community itself, and many times the voices express suspicion about one's religious loyalty rather than one's capability to work. As a laywoman, my gender can be seen as a problem. But what Venerable Xingyun has done is worthy of my respect, since he is able to see the unfair treatment of many venerable *bhikṣuṇīs* in various corners of the world. I would like to call, not only for equal treatment between venerable *bhikṣus* and *bhikṣuṇīs*, but

also for equal treatment among the nine groups of beings as Foguangshan has advocated.

Next, I would like to talk about the inevitable competition among religions in the future. I suppose not many of you know that there are already 19 different religions registered in Taiwan. Therefore, we can foretell that there will be fierce competition among these different religions in the future. I visited a Guanyin temple in Dan-Shui a few days ago that was very beautifully built and had many splendid Buddha statues. However, it has set a standard price of NT\$200 for drawing lots and other activities. Moreover, its weekly gatherings, which resemble Japanese Buddhist gatherings, are organized solely by laypeople. Here, I would like to suggest that all of us pay more attention to the development of religions in Taiwan. We should try to understand the development of different religions and the interactions among them, including the direction of recently emerging religions.

I am truly delighted to see that the Seventh Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women is being hosted in Taiwan, but it is a shame that there was insufficient media coverage for this conference. I hope that I can help provide service in this area, if it would be useful, so as to promote reportage about the conference.

Finally, I hope that all Buddhist women in the world, venerable *bhikṣuṇīs* as well as laywomen, will be firmly united and join their efforts, so that we can welcome a bright future together. Thank you all.







Miaoqing and Yuantong Chan Nunnery: A New Beginning for Monastic Women in Taiwan

Stefania Travagnin

This paper introduces the first part of a research project about the Buddhist women in Taiwan that I am conducting. Building on my previous work¹ on the history of the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha in Taiwan, with a special emphasis on the relationship between contemporary nuns and Buddhism for the Human Realm (*renjian fojiao*), I chose to focus my research on the community of Buddhist nuns in Taiwan as it existed before 1949, that is, the period before the arrival of mainland Chinese monks and the consequent spread of Chinese Buddhism, and before the establishment of the international Buddhist organizations prevailing nowadays on the island.

The main purposes of my research are: (1) to go back to the origins of the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha in Taiwan; (2) to explore the daily life and practice of Buddhist women (lay and monastic) in Taiwan during the Japanese Occupation and under the Japanese Buddhism; and (3) to discover, from the perspective of women in Buddhism, how Chinese Buddhism was transmitted and spread in Taiwan during the Japanese colonial period. Research on Buddhist women in Taiwan before 1949 entails a study of the *zhaigu* (“vegetarian women”), the relationship between Buddhism and the “vegetarian religion, Buddhism, popular religion in Taiwan, as well as the role of women in this religious context.

Yuantong Chan Nunnery

The three major places of practice for Buddhist women under Japanese colonialism were Longhu Nunnery (*Longhu an*),² Pilu Chan Nunnery (*Pilu chansi*),³ and Yuantong Chan Nunnery. The last of these was the major nunnery in northern Taiwan at that time and is the subject of this paper. This paper is not meant to offer an artistic description of the nunnery, which will be mentioned in few lines, but aims to analyze the religious practice followed by its resident women.⁴ I focus especially on the figure of Ven. Miaoqing, who was the founder of the nunnery and a guide for Buddhist women in northern Taiwan who were willing to undertake the path of Dharma cultivation. As Ven. Dajin, a disciple of Ven. Miaoqing, noted, “Ven. Miaoqing devoted her whole life to Buddhism, especially in establishing Yuantong Chan Nunnery, without a moment of rest, exerting herself to the upmost and gaining great merit.”⁵

My research is based on oral as well as written materials. The oral sources have been gathered during visits I made to both Yuantong Chan Nunnery and Ciyun Nunnery. The request, made during my first visit to Yuantong Chan Nunnery, for some materials on the history of the nunnery and the life and teachings of Ven. Miaoqing, was received with surprise.⁶ I was told that Yuantong Chan Nunnery was not such an important Buddhist place and was not worthy to be the theme of a paper. When I mentioned that Yuantong Chan was the first Buddhist nunnery built in Taiwan for women’s Buddhist education and cultivation, people around me were even more surprised.

The few written sources that I found include a few lines from books on the history of Taiwanese Buddhism⁷ and passages from historical magazines.⁸ The autobiography of Ven. Dajin, a disciple of Ven. Miaoqing, was extremely important for this research,⁹ as was a poem entitled *Yizuo* (Past Memories), written by Ven. Miaoqing before her death. The great contribution of Ven. Huiyan, whose writings on Buddhism in Taiwan during the first half of the 20th century have been primary sources for this paper, is also worthy of mention.¹⁰

Both oral and written materials on the situation of Buddhist women during this period are, unfortunately, quite scarce.¹¹ As a consequence, the Buddhist complexes built before the arrival of mainland monastics to Taiwan (around 1949) run the danger of sinking into oblivion. For this reason, I strongly believe in the necessity of further investigation in this field.

Ven. Miaoqing: Life and Teachings

Ven. Miaoqing, one of the so-called *niguwang* (monastic empresses),¹² was born in 1901 in Xinzhu County. Her lay name was Lin Tu. She got married

when she was 14 years old, to obey her parents' wishes. When she was 16, after giving birth to a girl, she divorced, and decided to take refuge in the Three Jewels and become a nun.¹³ First, she became a disciple of the *Zhaijiao* (commonly rendered into English as “vegetarian religion”)¹⁴ and renounced secular life in the Xiangshan Hall, which is one of the many *zhaitang*, or “vegetarian halls” that existed during the Japanese colonial period.¹⁵ Later, in 1920, she entered monastic life under Ven. Jueli at Fayun Monastery in Dahu (Miaoli County) where, over the next three years, she received her monastic education and training.

In 1924, Ven. Miaoqing moved to Zhonghe (Taipei County), which she considered the right place to found a nunnery as a refuge where Buddhist women could cultivate and practice the Buddha's teachings. She began to excavate the mountain the same year. Two years later, in 1926, with the assistance of Ven. Dasheng, she completed the first part of the nunnery. Yuantong Chan Nunnery took a total of 51 years to finish. The first expansion of the nunnery dates to 1929. We should keep in mind that it was a difficult task to get construction materials during the Japanese occupation. For this reason, the main shrine hall (*daxiong baodian*) took more than ten years to complete. Most parts of the nunnery were finished ten years after Taiwan returned to Chinese rule, but it was not until 1977 that the nunnery was totally completed and a ceremony was held to celebrate the event.

The expansion of Yuantong Chan Nunnery was planned and supervised by Ven. Miaoqing, with the assistance of Ven. Dajin, with the aim of allowing more people to enter Yuantong Chan Nunnery and meet the Dharma. Consequently, a meditation hall (*chanfang*), kitchen (*chufang*) and dining hall (*zhaitang*) were added. Ven. Dajin mentions the financial difficulties encountered by Yuantong Chan Nunnery. Indeed, she considered this to be the main cause of Ven. Miaoqing's sickness and death: “Our master spent a lifetime of suffering for money. All her pains resulted from money.”¹⁶

Ven. Miaoqing as Mother and Daughter

After Miaoqing became a nun, first her mother and then her daughter also entered the nunhood, and both joined Ven. Miaoqing in Yuan Tong Chan Nunnery. Miaoqing's mother became fully ordained under Ven. Jueli in Fayun Monastery and received the Dharma name Juehui. Ven. Miaoqing and Ven. Juehui remained at Fayun Monastery for three years of training, then moved to Zhonghe, where Ven. Miaoqing built Yuantong Chan Nunnery, to continue their Buddhist cultivation.

While in Yuantong Chan Nunnery, Ven. Juehui was called *hi mo*.¹⁷ Ven. Dajin briefly described the relationship between Miaoqing and her mother,

especially the time when Miaoqing's mother died.¹⁸ The story of Jinlian, Ven. Miaoqing's daughter, is amply described by Ven. Dajin in her autobiography. She includes a detailed report of how Jinlian became a nun and the second abbess of Yuantong Chan Nunnery,¹⁹ and the relationship between mother and daughter.²⁰

Jinlian was first given away for adoption. When she was 13 years old, she was brought into Yuantong Chan Nunnery and allowed to live together with her mother and the community of resident nuns. Despite the environment surrounding her, Jinlian did not take the tonsure or enter the nunhood at that time. Ven. Miaoqing sent her to a Buddhist University in Japan for study, but Jinlian became ill in Japan, returned to Taiwan, and was sent to the neurological department of a hospital. Ven. Dajin was assigned to take care of Jinlian through weekly visits. Jinlian was discharged from the hospital and went back to Yuantong Chan Nunnery, but finally ran away from the nunnery. The reaction of Ven. Miaoqing is well expressed by Ven. Dajin: "Every day Ven. Miaoqing went out for a walk, and when she was back home her eyes were red. Everyone knew she had cried and assumed it was because of Jinlian"²¹

When Ven. Miaoqing was on her deathbed, Jinlian returned to the nunnery, asked to take the tonsure, and was invested as the second abbess of Yuantong Chan Nunnery in 1956.²² "Ven. Miaoqing was wise and brilliant her whole life, and, in the end, showed a deep and meticulous love for her daughter. She could not forget the debt to her daughter, even when she had to make a decision about the next abbess.... Today, at 80 years old, when I think about that moment, my heart is still moved beyond words."²³ These words affirm Ven. Miaoqing's humanity. The story of Ven. Miaoqing at Yuantong Chan Nunnery is reminiscent of Pilu Chan Nunnery, which developed through the efforts of six sisters.

The only autobiographical source on Ven. Miaoquin's life available so far is a poem entitled "Past Memories" (*Yi zuo*).²⁴ The poem is a brief but meaningful testimony to the life of a female Chan master. The poem reports how Miaoqing encountered the Dharma path, her relationship with Ven. Jueli, her decision to take the tonsure, her entry into nunhood, her concept of practice (Soto Zen), her daily monastic life, the founding the Yuantong Chan Nunnery, and her engagement in the nuns' education and training. It is a helpful source for a better understanding of her life before and after becoming a nun under Ven. Jueli, as well as before and after the founding of Yuantong Chan Nunnery.

Ven. Miaoqing wrote this poem before she died. She was able to leave only this testimony, because at that moment all her disciples were out, and only old nuns, totally illiterate, were at her side. Here is my English translation of the poem:

Past memories in such a remote and pure place....
 I search my memories of the past.
 The time when I renounced the secular life,
 I was groping in the dark.
 When I met Ven. Jueli and made him my master,
 I received the tonsure,
 And the ordinary woman I was turned into a monastic.
 Every day, for the entire day, I devoted myself to the Buddha,
 Wholeheartedly practicing the unconditioned.
 My master opened the way to enlightenment,
 A path that I had never walked on before.
 All my thoughts were released, free and unfettered,
 With no more care for secular things.
 I moved into the monastery,
 Where I studied and practiced Chan for three years.
 My ordinary body accessed the Dharma and achieved peace,
 Where all the senses are spontaneous.
 When I was 26, I came here and founded this monastery.
 And devoted all my efforts to save the people.
 Supplicating day and night, I spread the Dharma .
 I decided to make this place of practice bright
 To enlightening people in the future.
 I gave birth to a girl, who is also now a nun
 And practices the Buddha's teachings with me.
 I abandoned the worldly path
 To walk the long, meaningful Buddhist path of cultivation.
 As a layperson, my name was Lin [Tu].
 When I was 30, my mother also renounced the mundane life
 And took refuge in the Dharma, with the monastic name Juhui.
 We practice here together.
 After the nunnery is established
 I plan to found a Buddhist institute for women,
 To nurture the talent of nuns.
 The wheel of Dharma turns unceasingly, round and round.

I would like to quote a few words from Ven. Dajin's autobiography, since they illuminate the meaning of Ven. Miaoqing's entering the *Saṅgha* (*chujia*). "Monastics must have aspirations and make vows. They cannot be afraid of difficulties and sufferings, and should not give up or shift their responsibilities onto others whenever they meet the "three not's: not knowing, not being able,

not daring.”²⁵ Renouncing the secular life is like leaving one’s small personal family and entering the big Buddhist family. Once you become a monk or nun, you should devote your efforts to spreading the Dharma and benefitting all human beings.²⁶ To quote Ven. Dajin:

What we call “practice” entails cultivation in walking and walking in cultivation. The Buddha gave up his throne, high position, and great wealth, and began to beg for his sustenance, walking several miles everyday. This is “practice.” All disciples of Buddha say, “The aim of going for all is to benefit and liberate humanity, so we should practice in the cities, no matter where, and always keep in mind the three ways karma is produced: bodily action, speech, and thought. The karma produced by speech is purified by words of praise, words of concern, and words of advise. Wherever you go, help and persuade human beings to practice the Dharma and to be exemplary people. This is the purification of the karma produced by bodily actions. When the brain does not think confusedly, and does not generate poor thoughts or evil intentions, but recites the Buddha’s name at every step and maintains a pure heart, the karma produced by thoughts is completely purified. “Practice” is continuous and neverending. The spread of the Dharma needs all kinds of talent, so you should bring your talents into full play and work hard for the Dharma.”²⁷

Again, Ven. Dajin says:

We cannot shift our responsibilities onto others because of the “three not’s.” When you do not know how to do something, just do it, and then you will know how to do it. When you are unable to do something, just do it, and then you will be able to do it. When you do not dare to do something, just do it, and then you will dare to face it. During this life, I realized that learning comes from personal experience. A difficulty that is hard to overcome must be faced to be overcome. First a burden arises, then we get brave and determined to do it again. Never get discouraged and never fall back because something is bitter or hard.”²⁸

Ven. Jueli’s Contributions to Buddhist Women in Taiwan

Ven. Miaqing was a disciple of Ven. Jueli, a Soto Zen master and native of mainland China whose practice ranged from *zhaijiao* to Soto Zen. According to Ven. Miaqing’s autobiography, it was he who introduced her to the Dharma path.²⁹ The name given to Yuantong Chan Nunnery also comes from the Ven. Jueli’s Japanese Buddhist name.³⁰

Ven. Jueli, who is the founder of one of the Four Great Lineages (*si da menpai*), helped to revitalize and develop Buddhism in Taiwan through two main efforts: educating the Saṅgha (especially nuns) and organizing ordination ceremonies.³¹ Under Ven. Jueli's guide, the Fayun lineage emphasized education and the observance of monastic discipline. Ven. Jueli sponsored seven full ordination ceremonies in which more than 250 disciples (male and female) were fully ordained.³² Ven. Jueli's initiatives were carried on by these disciples, who became founders of other places of religious practice all around Taiwan: Ven. Miaoking is one of them.

In actively promoting education and training programs for nuns, Ven. Jueli foresaw the key role that nuns would play in the future of Taiwanese Buddhism and laid the foundation for the present vitality. His contribution was essential to elevate the position of nuns in the monasteries and in society, which set the stage for the dominance of nuns in post-retrocession Taiwan.

In 1925, having noticed the low level of education of Taiwanese nuns, Ven. Jueli sponsored a six-month seminar at Yishan Monastery, located near Xinzhu, which Ven. Miaoking attended.³³ Women constituted the majority of Jueli's disciples and students. His concern for the condition of the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha in Taiwan was actualized through the foundation of nunneries such as Yuantong Chan Nunnery, Pilu Chan Nunnery,³⁴ Guanyin Mountain Institute³⁵ and Hongchan Dharma Institute.³⁶ These nunneries were planned as places of religious cultivation, education, and training for nuns, in keeping with the ideals of Ven. Jueli.³⁷ In her work in nuns' education and training, Ven. Miaoking followed perfectly the practice and teachings of her master.

Ven. Miaoking's Three Vows

According to Ven. Dajin, Ven. Miaoking made three main vows: to establish nunneries, Buddhist institutes, and orphanages.³⁸ Due to a financial shortfall, Ven. Miaoking was only able to accomplish the first of these vows. The second vow remained unfulfilled and later became the mission of her disciples. To fulfill her first vow, Ven. Miaoking founded Yuantong Chan Nunnery, and became its first abbess. She also established Ciyun Nunnery and supervised the building process, but left it to Ven. Dajin to run. Ven. Jueli was also the founder of Pilu Chan Nunnery. The third vow, to establish orphanages, is the only one which, for financial reasons, neither Ven. Miaoking nor her disciples were able to accomplish.

Yuantong Chan Nunnery was a project of Ven. Jueli which was concretely realized by Ven. Miaoking.³⁹ While Ven. Miaoking was building Yuantong Chan Nunnery, Ven. Jueli was assigned as abbot of Longshan Temple in Taipei. The close proximity between the two temples fostered cooperation.

Ven. Miaoqing's efforts to construct and later expand and renew Yuantong Chan Nunnery are mentioned quite often in Ven. Dajin's autobiography. Despite financial difficulties, especially during war time, Ven. Miaoqing never gave up, but encouraged her disciples to assist her in the task of building the nunnery. Her strength and endurance were remembered by Ven. Dajin: "Shifu was always strict and majestic at the same time when she had to deal with us," and "Few people can change whatever she has already decided"⁴⁰ It should be remembered that Yuantong Chan Nunnery was the result of generous help and large donations made by local devotees.⁴¹

At the beginning, Yuantong Chan Nunnery had only two or three residents. However, by 1936, ten years after its founding, Yuantong Chan Nunnery hosted 40 to 50 nuns, a number comparable to the number of residents at Fayun Monastery at that time.⁴² The daily life of the nunnery was regulated by the sound of the morning bell, the evening drum, and the exhortations to virtue and purity. Services were performed morning and evening. In the morning, human beings were invited to honor the Buddhas and *bodhisattvas* by chanting the Great Compassion Dharani and reciting the *Heart Sūtra*. In the evening, the nuns were exhorted to distinguish private matters from public matters, and to devote themselves to accomplishing public matters, without giving priority to private matters.⁴³

The monastic hierarchy at Yuantong Chan Nunnery was similar to most other Buddhist nunneries and monasteries in Taiwan at the time. Below the abbess (*zhuchi*), residents of the nunnery were organized into four main classes:

- 1) The nun who served as mediator between abbess and disciples (Chinese: *ang jia*);
- 2) The nuns in charge of recording income and expenses and keeping the books (Chinese: *usi*);
- 3) The nuns responsible of receiving visitors (*hi ke*); and
- 4) The nuns administrators of the shrine (*ei na*).⁴⁴

The Four Books, which Ven. Miaoqing taught every evening, played quite an important role in the educational program for nuns.⁴⁵ In addition, the resident nuns, participated in daily sessions of Zen Soto meditation. In addition to these regular activities at Yuantong Chan Nunnery, Dharma assemblies (*fahui*) held for the dead on the 16th day of the 3rd and 9th months, attracted many participants. A fragment of a letter sent by Ven. Miaoqing to her disciple Ven. Dajin reveals the relationship between the master and her disciples:

Dear Disciple,

I received and read your letter. A big fire broke out on the mountain behind our nunnery at 12:25 am on June 19. It was unexpected and the power of the fire was tremendously violent. Consequently, most

of the green hill turned to scorched earth. It was as close as the eye-brows to the eyes. May Buddha bless us! Yuantong Chan Nunnery is safe. All of us are safe. So you need not worry about us....⁴⁶

Yuantong Chan Nunnery currently has about 20 residents. According to the nun whom I interviewed, daily life at Yuantong Chan Nunnery today is not much different from when Ven. Miaoqing was the abbess. The residents still follow the schedule, including morning and evening chanting, and do daily Soto Zen meditation. They do not perform any special activities or ceremony, except for the Dharma assemblies on the 16th day of the 3rd and 9th month. The successive abbesses of Yuantong Chan Nunnery have included:

1926-1956	Ven. Miaoqing
1956-1976	Ven. Dachan
1976-1986	Ven. Dajing ⁴⁷
1987- Present	Ven. Ruhui ⁴⁸

Ciyun Nunnery

Ciyun Nunnery resulted from the efforts of both Ven. Miaoqing and Ven. Dajin.⁴⁹ Ven. Miaoqing is quoted as saying, “On the mountain behind us, a *bodhisattva* revealed himself. The *bodhisattva* seemed to have appeared to inspire tell us to build a new place of practice. I am already an aged woman, I cannot bear this task. But some of you, my disciples, can make a vow and re-build Ciyun Nunnery.”⁵⁰ Later, Ven. Miaoqing appointed Ven. Dajin as abbess, a sign of appreciation to her disciple, saying: “Dajin, since no one else seems willing to make this vow, you should take this burden.”⁵¹ This created a close connection between Ciyun Nunnery and Yuantong Chan Nunnery. It is usually said that the two nunneries are linked by a kind of “sisterhood.”⁵²

Difficulties similar to those faced in building Yuantong Chan Nunnery were also encountered at Ciyun Nunnery. There were not only financial difficulties, but also the question of attracting devotees: “I am not a native of this place. Yuantong Chan Nunnery has already 30 years of history, yet many people from Zhonghe still have not come to visit. You should try your best to create relationships with the natives.”⁵³ Today, at the foot of the mountain next to Ciyun Nunnery is the Dajin Building, which includes a library and hosts quite a few Buddhist (and other) social activities for the local people.⁵⁴ In 1954, Ven. Miaoqing wrote some verses on the main door of Ciyun Nunnery:

Compassion, guidance of humanity on the Dharma path,
Clouds, a place of Guanyin worship newly appears:
Compassion, brightly enlightening the samsaric world,
Clouds, a stream of mercy, savior of humanity.⁵⁵

The Second Vow: To Establish Buddhist Institutes

Ven. Miaoqing's second vow was realized after she died, through the efforts of succeeding abbesses. The resident nuns at Yuantong Chan Nunnery especially contributed to the establishment of Yuantong Buddhist Library and Ven. Dajin founded the Miaoqing Institute. Yuantong Buddhist Library, also called Miaoqing Sutra Storage Hall, was a result of cooperation between Ven. Dajin and Ven. Dasheng. A stone tablet displayed near the entrance says, "Yuantong Chan Nunnery Buddhist Library is established to accomplish the unfulfilled wish of our founder and previous abbess, Ven. Miaoqing." in Ven. Dajin's words:

In previous times, very few monastics took care of Buddhist education, but Ven. Miaoqing spent her whole poor life and energy to build Yuantong Chan Nunnery in hopes of educating and nurturing the community of nuns. The nunnery was meant to be a model of pure practice, transcending the worldly sphere, to spread the Dharma in a scenic spot. This noble ambition, which took 57 years to accomplish, became a testament to Ven. Miaoqing.

Ven. Miaoqing knew that Chinese people had been devoted to Buddhism for more than 1000 years, but because the teachings of Buddha are deep, human beings had no way to understand the scriptures and enter the gate of Dharma. For this reason, Ven. Miaoqing was determined to build a Buddhist Scriptures Library as a place to collect and enshrine the treasures and magazines of every Buddhist school. All materials in the library are the donations of lay devotees, to enable a thorough study of the teachings of the Buddha. The library was also designed for members of the community who are interested in Buddhism. It is the realization of Ven. Miaoqing's infinite mercy, compassion, and great aspiration to teach humanity. The library has adopted systematic introductions in simple language to better explain the profound theories of the Dharma. The library aims to guide human beings, through the Dharma wisdom, to enlightenment and liberation, to purify the human mind, and guide human beings to create an upright and stable society. The library also accomplishes the hope and vow to spread the Mahayana teachings and lead the masses to the farther shore.

After Ven. Miaoqing's death, I spent more than 20 years going through twists and turns to establish this library. Today, the nunnery can support the library financially. In 1982, to perfectly integrate the doctrines

of both Buddhism and Confucianism, I selected and purchased all kinds of books and classics. Buddhism was conceived as the principal philosophy, however, and Confucianism was considered secondary. All the books are available to all people. This library was completed in 1982, to fulfill the aspiration of Ven. Miaoqing to spread the Dharma and benefit the humanity. December 5, 1982.

On both sides of the main door is an inscription written by Ven. Dayin in 1982: "The wonderful Bhutatathata, like a bright circle. Purity through the enlightened mind."

Miaoqing Buddhist Institute

Miaoqing Buddhist Institute, located at Ciyun Nunnery, resulted from the efforts of Ven. Dajin.⁵⁶ Yuantong Buddhist Institute of Chinese Buddhism was meant to spread the principles of the *bodhisattva* path and to fulfill one of the three vows made by Ven. Miaoqing.⁵⁷ The first and only enrollment at Miaoqing Buddhist Institute occurred in 1977. Ven. Jueguang, President of the Hong Kong Buddhist Union Association, was invited to be the Dean of Miaoqing Buddhist Institute and to organize a three-year course. The 48 students enrolled were mostly monastics and, in accordance with the wishes of Ven. Miaoqing, no tuition fee was charged. At the end of the three-year program, the 48 students all graduated. Inscriptions surrounding the door reads: "The flow of Dharma wisdom accomplishes the vow and adorns a Buddha land. Practice on the way to Buddhahood until enlightenment is reached." Unfortunately, the institute soon closed. Except for special occasions, Yuantong Chan Library is no longer open to the public.

Conclusion

The final question I would like to discuss is whether Ven. Miaoqing was a practitioner of the Buddhism for the Human Realm (*renjian fojiao*) that spread in Taiwan. If the disciples' engagement is an expression of the master's teachings, Ven. Dajin's work is helpful for understanding Ven. Miaoqing. Points of contact between Ven. Miaoqing, her disciples, and *renjian fojiao* include:

1. The expansion of Yuantong Chan Nunnery was aimed at enabling more people to come in contact with Buddhism, which is one of the main principles of *renjian fojiao*.⁵⁸

2. In talking about Ciyun Nunnery, Ven Dajin stressed the close connection between the monastery/nunnery and human beings: "The monastery belongs to everyone; it is the result of the contributions of all the people around here, so no one can make it his own."⁵⁹

3. About the social engagement of Buddhism, she said: “I will give to society whatever I have, hoping that future generations will keep my ideals, devote their efforts to continue my work, and help Buddhism enlighten and benefit humanity, so I have no regrets.”⁶⁰

4. Ven. Dajin met several times and cooperated with some well-known representatives of *renjian fojiao*. The meeting that occurred in the 1960s between Ven. Dajin and Ven. Xiaoyun is especially worth mentioning. Ven. Xiaoyun heard about Ven. Dajin’s efforts at both Yuantong Chan Nunnery and Ciyun Nunnery, and visited her twice to express her appreciation and encouragement. Later, Ven. Dajin sent some of her disciples to the Lotus Ashram for Buddhist Studies (*Lianhua xuefo yuan*) for a four-year study program. One of those nuns was Ven. Zhenjian, who is currently running the Ciyun Dajin Building.

5. Ciyun Nunnery’s medical mission and the founding of the Ciyun Service Team (*Ciyun fuwudui*) for medical care date to 1975. These services were planned for the same purposes as Ciji Foundation founded by Ven. Zhengyan.

6. Ciyun Nunnery’s educational mission and the founding of Ciyun Buddhist Institute (*Ciyun Foxueyuan*) date to 1962. The first enrollment was 18 students. In 1967, when construction at Ciyun Nunnery was completed, the First Youth Seminar of Buddhist Studies was held.

I conclude that Ven. Miaoqing was a pioneer practitioner of Buddhism for the Human Realm (*renjian fojiao*).

NOTES

1. Stefania Travagnin, “Le Eredi di Guanyin. Ritratti di Maestre e Praticanti del Nuovo Buddismo Taiwanese,” master’s dissertation, Ca’ Foscari University of Venice, 2000; and Stefania Travagnin, “Walking on the Path of Guanyin. Prominent Buddhist Nuns in Taiwan,” unpublished paper.

2. Founded by Ven. Yongding in 1908 in Alian (Gaoxiong County).

3. Founded by Ven. Jueli in 1928 in Houli (Taizhong County).

4. For further details on the architecture of Yuantong Chan Nunnery, see Xing Fuquan, *Taiwan de Fo jiao yu Fosi* (Taipei: Taiwan shanwuyinshuguan, 1981), pp. 104–108.

5. Ven. Dajin, *Dajin fashi bashi zishu*, 1988, p. 126.

6. The first time I visited Yuantong Chan Nunnery, I received a brochure entitled *Yuantong chansi jianjie*. Further sources have been gathered thanks to the kind help of Ms. Huang (Ciyun Library), who was a mediator between Yuantong Chan Nunnery, Ven. Zhenjian, and me.

7. Here I refer especially to the works of Jiang Canteng, particularly Jiang Canteng, *Riju shiqi Taiwan Fojiao wenhua fazhan shi* (Taipei: Nantian, 2001); Kai Zhengzong, *Taiwan Fosi daoyou* (1) (Taipei: Puti zhangqing, 1989); Kai Zhengzong, *Taiwan Fojiao yibainian* (Taipei: Dongda, 1999); Xing Fuquan, *Taiwan de Fojiao yu Fosi* (Taipei: Taiwan shanwuyinshughan, 1981); Ven. Dongchu, *Zhongguo Fojiao jindai shi* (Taipei: Dongchu chubanshe, 1987); Zhang Mantao, *Zhongguo Fojiao shi lunji: Taiwan Fojiao bian*, Xiandai Fojiao xueshu congkan 87 (Taipei: Dasheng wenhua chubanshe, 1979); Luo Miaoji, "Taiwan Fojiao zhi lishi ji xianzhuang", in *Haichao yin wenku*, v. 17, pp. 68-78; Lan Jifu, *Ersbi shiji de Zhongri Fojiao* (Taipei: Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi, 1991); Zhu Qilin (ed.), *Taiwan Fojiao mingcha* (2 vols.) (Zhonghe: Huayu chubanshe, 1988); Lan Jifu, "Taiwan Fojiao zhi lishi fazhan de hongguan shi kaocha," in *Zhonghua Foxue xuebao*, n. 12, pp. 237-48; Lan Jifu, "Taiwan Fojiao fazhan de huigu yu qianjing," in *Dangdai*, n. 11, pp. 47-54; Wang Shunmin, "Dangdai Taiwan Fojiao bianquan zhi kaocha," in *Zhonghua Foxue xuebao*, n. 8, pp. 315-342; Ven. Zhenhua, "You Longhuan chuanjie shuodao Tianyi fashi," in *Xiangguang zhuangyan*, n. 52, 1986.12.20. For Western sources, see Charles B. Jones, *Buddhism in Taiwan. Religion and the State 1660-1990* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999).
8. See *Nanying Fojiao*: v. 7 n. 3 (pp. 64-65); v. 8 n. 7 (pp. 20-21); v. 12 n. 1 (p. 48); v. 14 n. 10 (p. 42), n. 12 (pp. 46, 52); v. 17 n. 2 (p. 51); v. 18 n. 8 (p. 33); *Nanying Fojiao huibao*: v. 3 n. 3 (p. 30), n. 4 (pp. 26-27); *Taiwan Fojiao*: v. 27 n. 1 (p. 14).
9. Dajin, *Dajin fashi bashi zishu*, 1988.
10. Shi Huiyan, "Ribei Caodongzong yu Taiwan Fojiao senglu de hudong," in *Zhonghua Foxue xuebao*, 1998, n.11, pp. 119-153; Shi Huiyan, "Cong Taiminri Fojiao de hudong kan niseng zai Taiwan de fazhan," in *Zhonghua Foxue xuebao*, 1999, n. 12, pp. 249-274; Shi Huiyan, "Taiwan Fojiao shiqianqi," in *Zhonghua Foxue xuebao*, n. 8, pp. 273-314. especially pp. 294-303; Shi Huiyan, "Xilaian shijian qianhou Taiwan Fojiao de dongxiang - yi Caodong zong wei zhongxin," in *Zhonghua Foxue xuebao*, n. 10, pp. 279-310.
11. One of them was Xing Fuquan, *Taiwan Fojiao yu Fosi*, 1981.
12. The title *niguwang*, which I translate as "monastic empress," does not refer to any noble status, but instead indicates a high level of education and a deep sense of culture as well as active engagement in promoting Buddhist education (including the founding of specialized institutes) and training the nuns. The *niguwang* became a model to imitate, a reference point for all the nuns subsequently engaged in renewing and improving female monastic education. On the title of *niguwang* as applied to Ven. Miaoqing, see Ven. Zhenhua, "You Longhuan chuanjie shuodao Tianyi," 1986; and Ven. Jianhua (ed.), *Shi Tianyi - zonguo Taiwan Fojiao chuanxingqi de biqiuni* (Taipei: Zhongtian, 1999), pp. 268, 282. According to different sources, nuns such as Ven. Ruxue, Ven. Tianyi, Ven. Xiuhui, and Ven. Yuanrong, were called *niguwang*. Also see Stefania Travagnin, "Walking on the Path of Guanyin. Prominent Buddhist Nuns in Taiwan" (forthcoming).
13. Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha

14. For a detailed analysis of *zhaijiao*, see: Jiang Caiteng and Wang Jianchan (eds.), *Taiwan Zhaijiao de lishi guancha yu zhanwang* (Taipei: Xinwenfeng, 1994); Wang Jianchuan, *Taiwan de Zhaijiao yu Luantang* (Taipei: Nantian, 1996); and Wang Jianchuan, *Tainan Dehuatang de lishi* (Taipei: Nantian, 1995). Among Western sources, see Charles B. Jones, *Buddhism in Taiwan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999), pp. 14-43.
15. Xiangshan Zhaitang then turned into a Buddhist monastery named Yishan Monastery.
16. Dajin, *Dajin fashi bashi zishu*, p. 43.
17. The character *mo* indicates “mother” and is an ancient way of referring to a “mother,” or old woman. Here it designates the mother-daughter relationship.
18. Dajin, *Dajin fashi bashi zishu*, p. 30.
19. Regarding questions of succession, at that time there were no fixed rules and matters were left up to the current abbess or abbot.
20. See Dajin, *Dajin fashi bashi zishu*, pp. 126-136.
21. Ibid., p. 130.
22. Actually, Ven. Dasheng, who had followed Ven. Miaoqing since the beginning and endured the difficulties of the founding process, was supposed to become the second abbess. Due to the firm determination of Jinlian to succeed her mother and run Yuantong Chan Nunnery, Ven. Miaoqing transmitted the position to her. However, when asked “Ven. Miaoqing, in the future, when Yuantong Chan Nunnery has problems or matters to be decided and you have already passed away, on whom should we rely?,” Ven. Miaoqing firmly stated, “Go to Ciyun Nunnery and look for Ven. Dajin” (Ven. Dajin, *Dajin fashi bashi zishu*, 1988, p. 133). Ven. Dachan also relied on Ven. Dajin, who at that time was mostly in charge of both Ciyun and Yuantong Chan Nunnery. Ven. Dajin reported that under the leadership of Ven. Dachan (1956-1976), the number of resident nuns fell to less than ten.
23. Dajin, *Dajin fashi bashi zishu*, p. 136.
24. Kan Zhengzong, *Taiwan Fosi daoyou* (1), 1991, p. 157.
25. Dajin, *Dajin fashi zishu*, p. 13.
26. Ibid., p. 13.
27. Ibid., pp. 56-57.
28. Ibid., p. 101.
29. For a detailed explanation of the role of Ven. Jueli as Soto Master in Taiwan as well as the position of the Zen Soto school in Taiwan, see Chanhui Shi, *Jueli chanshi nianpu*, Juefan faxing, 1981; and Jiang Canteng, *Riju shiqi Taiwan fojiao wenhua fazhanshi*, pp. 206-22.
30. Ven. Chanhui, *Jueli chanshi nianpu*, 1981, p. 127.
31. The Four Great Lineages of Taiwanese Buddhism during the Japanese period

were: (1) the Guanyin Mountain Lineage (*Guanyinshan pai*), based at the Lingyun Chan Monastery founded by Ven. Benyuan in Wugu (Taibei County); (2) the Yuemei Mountain Lineage (*Yuemeishan pai*), based at Lingquan Chan Monastery established by Ven. Shanhui in Jilong; (3) the Fayun Monastery Lineage (*Fayunsi pai*), based at Fayun Monastery run by Ven. Jueli in Dahu (Miaoli County); and the Dagang Mountain Lineage (*Dagangshan pai*), based at Chanofeng Monastery, rebuilt by Ven. Yongding in Alian (Gaoxiong County). The founding of these lineages entails the spread of Chinese Buddhism and the transmission of the full monastic ordination on the island.

32. These ordinations were held in 1918, 1919, 1920, 1921, 1926, 1927, and 1928. In transmitting the precepts and teaching discipline, Ven. Jueli followed the Chinese Buddhist tradition. Even though Ven. Jueli wore Japanese monastic robes and declared himself to be a Zen Soto master, he spread the Chinese interpretation and cultivation of Dharma, which was contrary to the prevalent tendency to adapt Taiwanese Buddhism to the Japanese tradition.

33. Ven. Jueli also founded the Fayun Women's Research Institute (*Fayun nuzhong yanjiuyuan*) at Fayun Monastery with an initial enrollment of 11 nuns. The educational program established by Ven. Jueli maintained relations with well-known monks in mainland China and encouraged student exchange among institutes in mainland China and Taiwan.

34. Pilu Chan Nunnery was established in 1928 in Houli (Taizhong County). It was noted for its educational program, which included the opportunity for the nuns to study abroad.

35. Guanyin Mountain Institute, built near Fayun Monastery, was conceived as a place of practice solely for women. Construction began in 1927 and was completed in one year.

36. Hongchan Dharma Institute, built in Jilong in 1928, resulted from the efforts of a laywoman, Lin Hongguang, under the supervision of Ven. Jueli. At the beginning there were 46 residents, mostly disciples of Ven. Jueli's disciple Ven. Dajing, who supervised the construction.

37. See Jiang Canteng, *Riju shiqi Taiwan Fojiao wenhua fazhan shi*, 2001, pp. 206–22.

38. Dajin, *Dajin fashi bashi zishu*, p. 55.

39. Jueli was born in 1881 in Fujian province. Among the four monks discussed in this paper, he is the only native of mainland China. His lay name was Lin Jinshi. In 1896, he was fully ordained under Ven. Wanshan at Yongquansi. In 1909, he traveled to Japan and Taiwan. Three years later, invited by Ven. Miaoguo, he moved to Taiwan and settled in Fayunsi (Dahu, Miaoli County). In 1917, in cooperation with other monks, such as Shanhui, he founded the Taiwan Buddhist Middle School (*Taiwan Fojiao zhongxuelin*). In 1925, he took part in the East Asian Buddhist Conference held in Tokyo. In 1928, he founded the Fayun Center for Buddhist Studies (*Fayun Foxueshe*). While in Taiwan, Ven. Jueli helped to revitalize and develop Buddhism locally through two main commitments: to promote monastic education (especially the training of nuns) and the organization of full monastic ordinations.

40. Dajin, *Dajin fashi zishu*, pp. 31, 49.
41. Ibid., pp. 34-37.
42. Ibid., p. 11.
43. Ibid., pp. 62-63.
44. Ibid., p. 56.
45. The Four Books, selected by Zhuxi as representative of the Confucian teachings, are: *Lunyu* (Analects), *Mengzi* (Mencius), *Daxue* (Great Learning), *Zhongyong* (Doctrine of the Mean).
46. Dajin, *Dajin fashi bashi zishu*, p. 43.
47. Ven. Dajin continued the expansion of Yuantong Chan Nunnery that was planned by Ven. Miaoqing and Ven. Dasheng. Ven. Dajin was also involved in humanitarian missions for the poor. She also sponsored a precept transmission ceremony on March 5, 1980, in memory of her teacher.
48. Ven. Ruhui, the current abbess, entered the Saṅgha under Ven. Miaoqing and graduated from the Chinese Buddhism Tripitaka Institute (*Zhongguo Fojiao sanzang xueyuan*). She was particularly talented in calligraphy.
49. The first Ciyun Nunnery was built between from 1851 and 1861, during the Qing Dynasty, but it was totally destroyed by a big fire in June 1954, the same fire Ven. Miaoqing mentions in her letter to Ven. Dajin.
50. Dajin, *Dajin fashi bashi zishu*, p. 47.
51. Ibid., p. 48.
52. The term “nunneries in sisterhood” (*jiemei si*) was coined by Kai Zhengzong.
53. Dajin, *Dajin fashi bashi zishu*, p. 49.
54. The current abbess of Ciyun Nunnery is Ven. Zhenyi, while the Dajin Building is run by Ven. Zhenjian.
55. Dajin, *Dajin fashi bashi zishu*, p. 69.
56. In 1979 President Jiang Jingguo visited Ciyun Nunnery as well as the students of the Miaoqing Buddhist College.
57. In addition to the Yuantong Library and the Miaoqing Buddhist Institute, a Miaoqing Memorial Hall (*Miaoqing shifu kaishan tang jinianguan*) was also set up in Yuantong Chan Nunnery.
58. Dajin, *Dajin fashi bashi zishu*, p. 61.
59. Ibid., p. 80.
60. Ibid., p. 90.







Religiosity and Leadership Among Taiwanese Buddhist Nuns

Yuchen Li

In the past two decades, Taiwanese society has witnessed groups of female college students entering the Buddhist order, and “discovered” many famous and powerful Buddhist nuns. These two phenomena reveal an ongoing process in which both the format and image of women’s devotion to religious life are changing. I will analyze the religious and gender implications behind these two phenomena through the association of these nuns with the image of Guanyin.

Guanyin has been represented in many different forms – from normal human form to multiple-headed, multi-armed spirits.¹ The images of Guanyin as a woman in a white robe and with a thousand arms and a thousand eyes are most popular in Taiwan. From the late sixteenth century to the present, the worship of Guanyin has dominated the religious life of Taiwanese women. The most important of the incarnations of Guanyin in Taiwan is the legendary figure of Princess Miaoshan. Originating in a fourteenth-century *baojuan* (precious scripture) and popularized by pilgrimage activities devoted to Guanyin, the legend of Princess Miaoshan has inspired innumerable Buddhist women to adopt vegetarianism and forswear marriage.² In the legend, Princess Miaoshan refuses marriage in order to fulfill her religious commitment and finally gains the recognition of her father by healing his mysterious illness as the incarnation of the thousand-armed and thousand-eyed Guanyin. Miaoshan’s appearance in the story is symbolic of her healing power as the personification of the *bodhisattva*. This legend is told in booklets and in books supplemented with personal testimonies to the miraculous power of Guanyin. When a miraculous cure is needed, Taiwanese pray to the thousand-armed

and thousand-eyed image of Guanyin found on the altars of Buddhist temples.

Historically, Chinese monks referred to Taiwan as “Guanyin’s Dharma field,” because of the scale of the pilgrimage activities devoted to the figure. Pilgrimage centers are always located in the mountains and are connected with important ritual activities on the coast of southeastern China. In the early days of Guanyin’s Taiwanese existence, temples in her honor were built by Chinese missionary monks and by local communities inspired by the mysterious incense bags they knew about from mainland Chinese Guanyin temples.³ Even during the Japanese colonial administration (1895–1945), Chinese monks continuously advertised in Taiwanese newspapers, touting the great value of pilgrimages to Zhejiang province’s Mt. Putuo.

Since the fourteenth century, a type of lay Buddhism referred to as “vegetarian religion” (*zhaijiao*) has dominated the religious landscape of Taiwan; female devotees tried to follow the example of Princess Miaoshan and led religious lives very similar to those of Buddhist nuns. Though they never put on the nun’s robe or shaved their heads, these women observed a strict asceticism and denied themselves meat and sex.⁴

The Chinese monks who fled to Taiwan after World War II were astonished to find that in their new island home, female devotees outnumbered monks, most of them vegetarian women. Such influential Chinese scholar monks as Yinshun and Mingfu attribute the overwhelming number of Taiwanese nuns to the popularity of Guanyin worship in Taiwan. “Since Taiwan was a land dedicated to the compassionate (female) bodhisattva Guanyin,” Mingfu said, “the number of Buddhist nuns tended to be greater than that of monks.”⁵ Taiwan has historically been considered a special place for Guanyin because of the remarkable number of female devotees and nuns found there.

In Taiwan, Buddhist nuns and Guanyin cannot be spoken of separately. Although monks established most of the pilgrimage centers dedicated to Guanyin, men are not thought of as speaking for her to the same charismatic extent that nuns are, thanks to the blessing of Guanyin. The most remarkable examples are Bhikṣuṇī Fuhui (1930–1985) and Bhikṣuṇī Zhengyan (1925–present). These nuns are greatly worshipped for their healing abilities. Fuhui performed miraculous healings by distributing “great compassion water” (*dabei shui*) in the name of the thousand-armed and thousand-eyed Guanyin, and Zhengyan established the Buddhist hospital system. Although they represent the opposite extremes of nuns’ charisma, from traditional to modern, both are respected as incarnations of Guanyin.

The Incarnation of Guanyin: Bhikṣuṇī Fuhui

Bhikṣuṇī Fuhui, who is known for her miraculous healing powers, founded

Da Xinshan Si (Great Merit Accumulation Nunnery) in the 1970s in Taiwan's Miaoli County.⁶ Over time, she began to perform miraculous healings and established a small nunnery that quickly became a bustling market crowded with the sick who placed their trust in her. Critically ill patients visited in great numbers to receive the holy water that Fuhui blessed. Though the nunnery moved after her death in 1985, pilgrims continue to make their way to the new site, where her relics are stored.

Da Xinshan Si has become a sacred place, famed for its healing water.⁷ At the present time, close to fifty tourist buses arrive at the temple every morning, and this number increases to five hundred during annual festivals. Ordinary tourists and pious housewives organize and conduct monthly pilgrimages to ensure the tranquility and health of themselves and their families. This small nunnery, established by a nun with eleven disciples, has become one of the largest pilgrimage centers in Taiwan.

Making offerings and eating special food (including drinking the blessed water) pervades almost every activity of pilgrims to nunnery. Fuhui established a strict rule against accepting any donations, except for fresh vegetables and raw noodles. The donated food is used to feed the visitors and, according to legend, the meal prepared is always exactly the right amount for the number of visitors. On the way to the nunnery, pilgrims conduct Buddhist prayers and share breakfast on the bus. From the entrance of the site, pilgrims move toward the nunnery on their hands and knees along a muddy and rugged road, while chanting a confession verse to pay their respect to Fuhui. At the end of their climb, they arrive at the Dharma Hall, where they wash their hands and ascend to the Guanyin Hall to worship the statue of Fuhui. To the right side of the altar, two nuns distribute holy water in small orange bowls and three-gallon white plastic buckets. Three gallons is the monthly allotment assigned to each family. After making vows and drinking the blessed water in front of the statue of Fuhui, pilgrims descend from the Guanyin Hall to the spacious tent to eat noodles (*pingan mian*, the "noodle of tranquility"). Six times a year – on the inauguration of the nunnery, the birthdays of Buddha, Guanyin, and Fuhui, and the dates Guanyin entered the order and achieved enlightenment – the nunnery offers rice ball soup (*pingan wan*, the "ball of tranquility").

Fuhui is viewed as the embodiment of Guanyin due to her performance of miraculous healing through the Great Compassion Water. The sincere recitation of the "Supreme Mantra of Thousand-armed and Thousand-eyed Guanyin" is a very important Buddhist practice that is believed to transform ordinary water into miraculous medicine. The power of the Great Compassion Water of Da Xinshan Si is attributed to Fuhui. Her strict ascetic regimen included fasting by limiting her intake to nothing but Great Compassion Water, meditating all night (and even for weeks), maintaining a vow of silence at an aban-

doned house, and subsisting on discarded vegetables. Despite her extremely strict diet, she provided food for others. The efficacy of the holy water is usually attributed to the power of Guanyin, a transcendent authority. So remarkable were her healings that Fuhui was viewed as the incarnation of Guanyin.⁸

A statue of Fuhui contains her relics and depicts her as a smiling nun sitting with legs folded. This image is on display at the Guanyin Hall along with statues of Sakyamuni Buddha as a child and various images of Guanyin, ranging from a woman draped in white to the Thousand-armed and Thousand-eyed Guanyin. The exhibiting of various statues of Guanyin on the same altar usually identifies the temple as a “natal home” of Guanyin. Moreover, pilgrims to the nunnery honor Fuhui as the “Bodhisattva who saves the world through great kindness and great compassion” and the “bodhisattva master who alleviates difficulty and suffering”—two epithets that are, in fact, the most popular titles assigned to Guanyin. Moreover, Fuhui’s disciples and supplicants claim that Fuhui often appears in dreams as a figure dressed in a white robe. Guanyin is the most distinctive female symbol within Chinese Buddhism and her female characteristics are believed to explain women’s widespread devotion to her, as with the sacred image of Fuhui.

The Selected Agent of Guanyin: Bhikṣuṇī Zhengyan

The image of Zhengyan is also referred to as an incarnation of Guanyin, but her relationship with Guanyin is constructed in a different way. Though Zhengyan also devoted herself to certain forms of asceticism, such as offering food and medical care in emergencies, she established her reputation by organizing philanthropic work. Ciji, founded and directed by Zhengyan, was one of the most successful grassroots movements in Taiwan during the last two decades of the twentieth century.⁹ Through the association, which is devoted to various philanthropic activities around the world, Zhengyan wields great power as a Buddhist nun, since three million laywomen (who make up at least 80% of the association’s membership) do her bidding. Not only is Zhengyan’s association a financial force to be reckoned with, but the hospital it runs also offers excellent opportunities for its members to “experience the reality of suffering” through routine volunteer service. Ciji is the archetype of a moral revival movement and Zhengyan is a symbol of limitless compassion, a “Taiwanese Mother Theresa,” and the “consciousness of Taiwan (*taiwan de liangxin*).”¹⁰

Through strength of will and personality, Zhengyan created a modern vocation, modeled on that of Guanyin, at the meeting place of human resources, modern technology, and religious community. Most importantly, Ciji Buddhist Hospital fulfills Zhengyan’s commitment to the bodhisattva vow of compassion and simultaneously connects her with the maternal side of Guanyin.

All of the statues and pictures dedicated to Zhengyan by her followers are displayed in the hospital and the convent, and they are exclusively in the form of the female image of Guanyin.

Unlike Fuhui, the personal charisma of Zhengyan is not only attributable to the efficacy (*ling*) of Guanyin but also to the strength of her own filial piety. The miraculous recovery of parents from illness thanks to Guanyin's blessings constitutes the main theme in the lives of these two heroines. Zhengyan's adoptive mother was often confined to her bed by poor health. So critical was her condition on one occasion that Zhengyan made an appeal to Guanyin: If her mother recovered, Zhengyan was willing to offer her own life as a replacement. For three nights Guanyin appeared in Zhengyan's dreams as a gentle figure dressed in white. In a shabby cottage she handed medicine to Zhengyan and watched her prepare it and administer it to her mother. After the dream on the third night, Zhengyan's mother suddenly recovered. In thanks, Zhengyan embarked on a lifelong vegetarian diet. From then on, villagers addressed Zhengyan as "the filial daughter" (*xiaonu*).

Miracles do not happen every time. The sincerity of Zhengyan did not bring back her father. From her teens, Zhengyan showed great competence in helping her adoptive father run a string of dramatic theaters. When her father had a stroke, Zhengyan moved him from his office back to the family home, which worsened his condition. To save him, Zhengyan braved foul weather, kneeling on the muddy ground through the long rainy night praying to Guanyin. But her efforts were in vain and her father died. Zhengyan experienced the torments of guilt. Crazy, she searched for her father's soul, and consulted spirit mediums that promised to look for her father in hell. Finally, she was inspired by Buddhism and made a determination to enter the Buddhist order.¹¹

After arranging the family business so that it would support her mother and four younger brothers, Zhengyan left home in order to fulfill her religious commitment. After she had been absent from home for several months, Zhengyan's mother finally accepted her decision. In time, Zhengyan gave up the life of a wandering mendicant and took up residence in a small temple that bore a remarkable resemblance to the cottage that had appeared in her dreams. So ramshackle was the hermitage that Zhengyan had to place her small cot next to the altar set up to worship Guanyin. On the first and fifteenth days of every month she chanted *sūtras* from the Buddhist canon in this small cell and transferred the merit to her father. Soon her neighbors noticed a bright light radiating from this poor temple twice every month and recognized her pious devotions.

Zhengyan finally released herself from guilt by entering the Buddhist order.¹² She interpreted her father's death as an even more profound teaching

from Guanyin – a lesson about the reality of sorrow and the need to transform filial piety into transcendent compassion.¹³ More than once, Zhengyan's public appearances were marked by emotional outbursts in which she revisited her father's death. "If my father's doctor had told me not to move him, if I had known anything about medicine, I would not have taken him home from that hot and noisy office."¹⁴

The explanation most commonly offered for Zhengyan's determination to build the Buddhist Ciji Hospital involved the story of an aboriginal Taiwanese woman who was refused emergency medical treatment when she could not pay, but I tend to believe that Zhengyan was also motivated by her father's death. Her habit of addressing doctors and nurses as "Venerable One in White" (*baiyi dashi*), a popular epithet for Guanyin, supports my argument. Most importantly, like Miaoshan, Zhengyan is recognized as a filial daughter who extended her compassion to all people.

To a great degree, the popularity and consequent success of Zhengyan's order has been attributed to similarities between her story and that of Miaoshan, the well-known incarnation of Guanyin. After the first version of Zhengyan's biography, written by Huijian Chen in 1982, a new chapter was added to her official biography. This chapter focuses on a reference made by Zhengyan to the members of the Ciji Association as being the thousand arms and thousand eyes of the bodisattva Guanyin.¹⁵

The inspirational legend of Princess Miaoshan reflects the conflict between filial piety and religious piety. While her father hopes that a suitable marriage will guarantee Princess Miaoshan's happiness and maintain the good name of the family, to her it creates a momentous conflict between her duty to her family and to her religious beliefs.¹⁶ Miaoshan's devotion to Buddhism so enrages her father that he tries to murder her. She barely escapes, only to set out on a living journey to the underworld. At the moment when she releases the suffering ghosts from their infernal captivity, Miaoshan reveals her identity as Guanyin. Apprised that her father has fallen ill – a punishment for having killed Miaoshan's fellow nuns instead of her – Miaoshan disguises herself as a mendicant Buddhist and cures her father by treating him with medicine made from her eyes and arms. Finally, her father recognizes her and is converted to Buddhism, at which point Miaoshan miraculously grows new eyes and arms, becoming the thousand-eyed and thousand-armed incarnation of Guanyin. By combining filial piety with transcendent compassion for all human beings, Miaoshan finally wins the recognition her father has withheld and symbolically resolves the dilemma faced by all Chinese women.

As the beneficiary of the miraculous healing of Guanyin, the role of Zhengyan is distinct from that of Miaoshan. However, some striking similarities exist between the legend of Miaoshan and the biography of Zhengyan.

First of all, both involve the conflict between filial piety and religious commitment, a fundamental dilemma for Chinese women, particularly the dilemma of gaining recognition from their parents. Zhengyan was a filial daughter who resisted marriage and converted to Buddhism on behalf of her deceased father. This leads to the second motif: Suffering daughters find relief by repaying filial piety through the universal compassion of Guanyin to all human beings. Third, both stories demonstrate the continued influence of traditional gender expectations of Buddhist women through the feminine characteristics of Guanyin. The feminine attributes of Guanyin, combined with the virtues of healing and nurturing, form a powerful image of female religiosity. While Miaoshan shared food with animals and saved hungry ghosts in hell, Zhengyan initiated her philanthropic organization by offering emergency aid and food to the poor. The establishment of Ciji Hospital also aimed at helping the poor. Guanyin symbolizes the feminization of Buddhist virtue: unconditional love and universal compassion. In turn, Chinese daughters are able to justify their religious commitment by identifying themselves with Guanyin.

Both Fuhui and Zhengyan are associated with the feminine attributes of Guanyin and exhibit her divinity through healing and nurturing. They continuously demonstrate the strong commitment of Taiwanese nuns to emulating the example set by Guanyin. By establishing Ciji, in particular, Zhengyan did this in a very accessible way. She established Ciji Buddhist Hospital and Ciji Nursing and Medical Schools to lend the “Venerable One in White” a palpable presence in the mundane world. At the same time, the thousands of volunteer workers who partially staff these establishments act as the thousand arms and thousand eyes of Guanyin.

The theme of being the thousand arms and thousand eyes of Guanyin has become a social symbol signifying the cooperation and loyalty of the Ciji membership. Zhengyan specifically encourages her followers to function as her “arms and eyes” in fulfilling their Buddhist vocation. In this way, the missionary and philanthropic work of Ciji is defined as the path of the *bodhisattva* Guanyin and every member is recognized as a potential *bodhisattva*. In contemporary Taiwan, Guanyin’s arms and eyes are real people – the pious Buddhist volunteers who help their masters fulfill the career of the *bodhisattva*. The affiliation with Guanyin not only constitutes the communal identity of Ciji, but also creates a meaningful relationship between Zhengyan and her followers.

By comparison, the image of Fuhui represents the divine incarnation of Guanyin rather than the selected agent of Guanyin, as in the case of Zhengyan. Fuhui’s extraordinary asceticism resulted in her magical power of healing, which is a difficult example to follow. In this regard, the power of Fuhui is similar to the legend of Princess Miaoshan. By contrast, the institutional-

ized discipline that Zhenyan has established for the followers of Guanyin is a much easier example to follow. However, neither of these two representations – neither the divine incarnation beyond description nor the skillful adoption of organization strategy – detracts from the charisma of these two Buddhist nuns. Unselfish giving and self-sacrifice in the name of Guanyin characterize the religiosity of both these two nuns.

The Communal and Self Identity of the Taiwanese Nuns

While participating at a meeting at a nunnery, I overheard an argument between a 40-year-old woman and a young nun. They both agreed that the social image of Buddhist nuns had greatly improved in recent years. But whereas the nun argued that the improved educational level of nuns had brought about this change, the laywoman insisted that it was the influential reputation of Ven. Zhengyan.

To a great extent, I agree with the laywoman's observation. Taiwanese society has witnessed the nuns' potential through observing the work of this leading figure. Many factors contribute to the Ven. Zhengyan's fame, but it is her embodiment as Guanyin – a compassionate, self-sacrificing, and feminine image – that especially legitimizes her leadership as a woman. In part because Taiwanese are so well acquainted with Guanyin, they quickly accept Ven. Zhengyan, but they somehow neglect the way in which she expanded the meaning of “being devoted” to Guanyin for women. Not only did Ven. Zhengyan transform Guanyin into a symbol of the bond between laywomen and nuns, but she also legitimized nuns' efforts to engage in social activities as appropriate religious practice. Her model is much more persuasive than the educational profile of nuns in contemporary Taiwan.

The appearance of the term “scholar nun” in Buddhist circles in the 1990s was evidence of an emerging trend for educated young women to enter the Buddhist order. Most Buddhists, especially the older generation of women born before the 1950s, were inspired by leading nuns, but still viewed Buddhist practice through a traditional lens. Since the stereotype of Buddhist nuns as discarded and disadvantaged women was still dominant in the minds of the older generation, they tended to regard scholarly nuns as individual cases or exceptions. They were not ready to confront the changing reality.

As the young nun in the incident above pointed out, the educational profile of Taiwanese nuns has greatly improved. In postwar Taiwan, many Buddhist monasteries established their own monastic schools to educate nuns and young people. To improve the quality of monastic personnel, most Buddhist groups target college students, organize various summer camps, and offer fellowships to encourage Buddhist research among young students. However, the

promotion and reinterpretation of Guanyin belief promoted by Ven. Zhengyan offers a new religious category for the society: to accept the monastic endeavor of “educating” the younger generation.

It is not Zhengyan’s domestic image or the Great Compassion Water of Fuhui that have awakened Taiwanese society to the thousand-armed, thousand-eyed image of Guanyin, but the contemporary image of Buddhist nuns as women of ability, industry, and esoteric knowledge. Whether in the crowded streets of Taipei or the small village roads of rural Taiwan, people are used to seeing nuns driving cars and using cell phones. Nuns also give public lectures on the radio, television, and at large public gatherings. Inside nunnery walls, many nuns are surfing the internet and setting up complicated computing systems. Abroad, Taiwanese nuns are busy developing missionary sites in American Chinatowns and remote European locations. Today, Taiwanese nuns are active in conducting public discussions on religious affairs on television, publishing Buddhist books, exhibiting their art work, and teaching a variety of classes. Taiwanese nuns now penetrate almost every corner of social life.

The biographies of Zhengyan endow the metaphor of the thousand arms and thousand eyes with a strong notion of community. As Zhengyan became identified with Guanyin, Princess Miaoshan ceased to be regarded primarily as a filial daughter and came to be seen as a potent nun. When Zhengyan herself spoke of the thousand eyes and thousand arms of Guanyin, she was offering a modern interpretation of Guanyin, and the increasing visibility and vitality of scholar nuns guaranteed that the image would strongly reverberate throughout society.

Ciji’s utilization of the symbol of Guanyin exemplifies the expanding notion of community among Taiwanese Buddhist women. In the legend of Princess Miaoshan and in the case of Fuhui, the thousand-armed, thousand-eyed image of Guanyin is referred to in terms of its inherited healing power. More specifically, in the legend of Princess Miaoshan the arms and eyes function as tools for people consciously devoted to the bodhisattva path. However, the relationship of these arms and eyes with Guanyin also represents the collectivity of the path of the bodhisattva Guanyin as expressed in the relationship between nuns and laypeople.

It is difficult to ascertain whether it was nuns or laypeople who first started using the image of the thousand-armed and thousand-eyed image of Guanyin. Both nuns and laypeople take their notions of community identity from this image. For instance, many Taiwanese Buddhist groups address lay devotees as “thousand-armed, thousand-eyed *bodhisattvas*.” Today, the media even addresses career women with children as thousand-armed, thousand-eyed images of Guanyin.

Young nuns also tend to describe their religious vocation as that of thousand-armed, thousand-eyed Guanyin. However, nuns use the image somewhat differently than laypeople. For the scholar nuns, who are busy with missionary work, a set of almighty arms and eyes is a necessary asset. The thousand-armed, thousand-eyed image legitimizes their adopting modern technology, such as computers, cell phones, and cars. In addition to the help they receive from laypeople, these nuns equip themselves with secular professional skills, mainly through college education. For example, the nuns of the Foguangshan order refer to their yearly activity, consisting mainly of social education and public lectures, as “the work of the thousand-armed, and thousand-eyed Guanyin.” One of the first nuns to promote the image of the thousand-armed, thousand-eyed Guanyin in the Foguangshan order was Bhikṣuṇī Yongyun. She proposed and organized a series of missionary activities and publications, the latter entitled “Activities of the Thousand-Eyed and Thousand-Armed Guanyin.”¹⁷ Yongyun has spoken about relying on different aspects of Guanyin to address different people’s needs. To a great degree, the process Yongyun is involved in is coherent with Sangren’s theory of *ling* (efficacy).¹⁸ The “borrowed” identity is not only attributed to the mighty influence of Guanyin, but also indicates the skillful capability of using modern techniques and organizing a busy schedule of missionary work. For modern scholar nuns busily engaged in missionary work, a set of almighty arms and eyes is indispensable.

Both the ability to adjust to the modern world and the mutual support offered by collaborative arms and eyes contribute to the self-identity of Taiwanese nuns. The monastic communities of nuns in Taiwan prefer to conduct missionaries and work collectively. This makes it easier for individual nuns, as compared to their male counterparts, to confront charges of spiritual proud in dealing with conventional gender politics. For this reason, nuns tend to aggregate into groups for safety and support, both financially and spiritually. The close ties among nuns have been accented over the last two decades with the emergence of large monastic communities such as the Buddhist Luminary Society (Xiangguang Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha), the Foguanshan order, and Zhongtai Chansi. Symbolically, the arms and eyes of Guanyin inspire the notion of community at these monasteries, especially among their female members, and also play an important role in internalizing their loyalty.

Along with the social changes that occurred during the last thirty years of the twentieth century have come anxieties. As Taiwanese women have struggled to make traditional gender roles work in an age of two-parent employment, anxiety has stimulated many women to search for recognition through the Buddhist order. The catch is that some Taiwanese women have chosen a very traditional way to protest inflexible family structures. Scholar nuns are certainly religious figures, but the emphasis they place on Buddhist ordination

as an alternative route for recognition makes their vocation very similar to a secular career. At the same time, while taking robes initiates a woman's religious career, it also reflects a strong feminist consciousness, even though it is a career legitimized in the context of religious reform.

The model provided by the thousand-armed and thousand-eyed Guanyin has long affected the religious life of Taiwanese Buddhist women by persuading them that recognition in a patrilineal society is possible. But the younger generation of scholar nuns possesses a new set of social resources, including higher education and a commitment to the modernization of Buddhism. In this way, they have put the image of Guanyin to new use. Many have been able to resolve the tensions in modern society and in their own lives by turning to a modernized version of the Buddhist feminine ideal.

NOTES

1. Chun-fang Yu, *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokitesvara* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).
2. Glen Dudbridge, *The Legend of Miaoshan* (London: Ithaca Press, 1978); and C. N. Tay, "Kuan yin: The Cult of Half Asia," *History of Religions* 16 (1976): 147-76.
3. Zhangyi Yin, "Fojiao zai Taiwan de zhankai (1661- 1985) (The early development of Buddhism in Taiwan)," in *Taiwan fojiao de lishi yu wenhua* (The Culture and History of Taiwanese Buddhism), Canteng Jiang and Pengcheng Gong, eds. (Taipei: Prajnaparamita Foundation, 1994), pp. 15-48.
4. The Chinese system of Buddhist ordination somehow shifted these vegetarian women into the ranks of Buddhist nuns between the 1960s and the 1970s. More careful study of the religious change that took place during this period would no doubt yield interesting results, but the focus of this paper is somewhat different.
5. Minfu, *Yijujī* (One Word Above All Affects My Life) Taipei: Foguang shuju, 1995.
6. Chen, Huijian, "Wuming biqiuni suifanglu (An Anonymous Nun), in *Dangdai Fomen renwu* (Contemporary Buddhist Figures), Huijian Chen, ed. (Taipei: Dongda, 1984), pp. 285-97.
7. Ding-tzan Li, "Zongjiao yu zhimin: Taiwan Fojiao de bianqian yu zhuanxing (1895-1995) (Religion and colonial Discourse: The Historical Transformation of Buddhism in Taiwan, 1895-1995)," *Bulletin of the Institute of Ethnology* 81 (Spring 1996): 19-52; and Xiufang Lin, "Taiwan Jiuhuashan chuanqi (The Legend of Taiwan's Mt. Jiuhua), *United Times* 10:26 (1995): 40.
8. Daxingshansi, *Jiushi pusa xinghua ganyinglu* (Testimonies on the Incarnation of a Bodhisattva Savior) (Miaoli: Jiuhuashan Daxingshansi, 1987), pp. 4, 9, 155, 157, 217.

9. Huang, Chian-yu J. and Robert P. Weller (1998), "Merit and Mothering: Women and Social Welfare in Taiwanese Buddhism," *Journal of Asian Studies* 57.2 (May): 379-396; and Li, "Zongjiao yu zhimin.
10. Zhao, Xianming, *Taiwan Sanjuren: Diyiwei Taiwanren zongtong Li Denghui, jishi-jiuren de huopusa Shi Zhengyan, Taiwan de jingying zhi shen Wang Rongqing* (The Three Taiwanese Giants: The First Taiwanese President, Li Denghui; the Living Bodhisattva Zhengyan; and the God of Economic Administrators, Wang Yongqing) (Taipei: Kaijin wenhua, 1994), pp. 149-51.
11. Chen, Huijian, *Zhengyan fashi de Ciji shijie* (The Ciji World of Venerable Zhengyan), Taipei: Ciji Wenhua Chubanshe, 1988.
12. Based on the series of interviews I conducted, it seems that a desire to repay Guanyin for the miraculous healing of parents or grandparents accounts for the entry of a large number of women into monastic orders in Taiwan.
13. I was told the story of another Taiwanese nun whose experience closely resembled that of Zhengyan. She had taken monastic vows in hopes that this would guarantee her mother's earthly salvation. When her mother died, the nun did not falter in her devotion to Guanyin and maintained her original vows. (Field notes, Jinshan, Taipei, 1996.)
14. The first tape of Zhengyan, "*Jingsiyu*," is a collection of her public talks and has been widely distributed since 1980s.
15. Yu, *Kuan-yin*, 1995.
16. Steven P. Sangren, "Female Gender in Chinese Religious Symbols: Kuan Yin, Ma Tsu, and the Eternal Mother," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 9:1 (1983): 4-25.
17. Zhenghuang Zheng, *Yuanyang de Fanchang: Fojiao zai Yaxiya* (The Spread of Buddhist Music: Asian Buddhism) (Taipei: Foguang Bookstore, 1994.
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Bridging the Gender Gap, Transforming Institutions





The Nature and Status of Women in the Teachings of the Buddha

Thich Nu Minh Hue (Hong Nga)

In recent years, the contributions of many prominent women in all aspects of the society have awakened a dormant interest in theories about women, especially from religious points of view. Demands for a re-examination of women's issues have been increasing in both Asia and the West, finding support in almost every sector of society. A re-examination of the nature and status of women raises many theoretical concerns in philosophy and religion. Eminent scholars, philosophers, sociologists, and religious leaders have done valuable work in re-evaluating the changing status of women in the world's religions. In Islamic, Christian, and Hindu countries, the controversy regarding women's issues has resulted in much dissension within these traditions regarding traditional interpretations of philosophy and culture.

Buddhism, both as a religion and a social phenomenon, has also drawn considerable attention. What is Buddhism's attitude towards women and how does its attitude differ from those of other religions? Does Buddhism offer teachings equally for women in a way that affirms the message of its founder as a teacher of gods and humans? Was the Buddha the first religious teacher to open the Dharma door to liberate women?

The Buddha was a great benefactor of humanity. After he attained enlightenment in Bodhgaya and gave his first teaching in Sarnath, the Buddha founded the order of monks. This order of monks increased and spread throughout India over the course of the Buddha's 45-year ministry. The Buddha established a similar order for nuns with almost the same discipline, with the addition of some extra rules. From the sixth century BCE, the Buddhist

order of nuns constituted a strong and vital force in the religious and cultural history of India.

Buddhism introduced radical changes, both regarding doctrine and the practical side of religious life. Worldly life is full of obstacles and hindrances that make it difficult for people to make spiritual progress. It is more difficult for laypeople to practice, because of their many worldly responsibilities. Monks and nuns, being free of these duties, are expected to work diligently in pursuit of the spiritual goal, guided by the common ideal of a virtuous life. Nuns and monks walk a path based on clear knowledge and awakening, emphasizing virtue and human development more than rites and rituals.

If properly developed, the potential of human beings results in strength, freedom, and a meaningful life. In this respect, there is no difference between women and men. The admission of women into the Buddhist Saṅgha and their spiritual and cultural achievements bear witness to this statement. Although the Buddha was initially unwilling to admit women into the Saṅgha, this does not mean that he bore a grudge against women or doubted their capacities to attain higher knowledge. In the *Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra*, the Buddha says that, until and unless the four categories of disciples of the Buddhist community (*bhikkhus*, *bhikkhunīs*, *upāsakas*, and *upāsikās*) are well established in the Dharma, he would not consider entering *parinirvāna*. During his lifetime, the Buddha personally established the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha by giving the right of full ordination to women. As soon as women received permission from the Buddha to enter the order, a new and experimental religious lifestyle opened before them.

It is not difficult to find *sūtras* that describe the nature and status of women during the Buddha's lifetime. The equality of human beings in the Buddha's teachings is verified by the fact that women are equally extolled for their capabilities, including excellence in memory, skill in debate, and their ability to quickly attain enlightenment. The names of outstanding women followers are mentioned in the Pāli *sūtras*. Therī Khema was extolled as foremost in great wisdom amongst the nuns. Uppalavanna, the greatest in insight, gave us theories about impermanence and women's virtue. Therī Kisagotamī, who belonged to the lowest caste, demonstrated that caste, class, and economic status were no bar to joining the Buddhist order and becoming an *arhat*. Therī Sona, a busy housewife and the mother of many children, is evidence of the virtue of selfless love. Patacara, the model of the Vinaya for the nuns, became renowned for her strict practice of the precepts and became an *arhat*, despite the misfortunes she suffered during her earlier marriage. The elderly nun Rupānanda and Sundarinanda, who was the half-sister of the Buddha, demonstrated their mastery of the Buddha's teachings when they skillfully taught a young woman about impermanence and the foulness of the body.

These nuns exemplify the great achievements in the holy life that many different kinds of women attained by following the teachings of the Buddha. The Buddha's statement to Ānanda, that women can also attain *arhat*ship, is nothing other than an affirmation of the equal status of women and men with respect to their spiritual potential. In addition, it is important to study the nature of women through the lens of the Buddha's teachings. To investigate the implications of the Buddha's teachings for women will be a major contribution to current research in women's studies.

The Status and Nature of Women Before and During the Buddha's Time

The status of women in society before the Buddha's time testifies to the social inequality between women and men that existed in India and elsewhere during that period. Historically, the position of women in Indian society has experienced many ups and downs. According to some, women's position in the Vedic period was quite high: "The glory of women during the Vedic Age is fully and clearly manifest from the *suktas* of the revered *rishikas* ("women seers") themselves, as well as from numerous other unassailable proof with which the entire Vedic literature abounds. Thus, as daughters, sisters, wives, and mothers, women had equally honored places in family, society, and state alike."

As is well-known, however, the position of women in Hindu society declined later on. An idea of this decline can be gleaned from the classic legal code of India, the *Laws of Manu*. This work, which describes the traditional duties of women in Hindu society, mentions women as the epitome of what is dangerous, carnal, and evil, and asserts that women are in constant need of control and subordination. In some instances, women are portrayed as the source of evil. Women were not only viewed as inferior in society at large, but were also looked down upon in the family. A woman had to depend on her father during her childhood, belonged to her husband as soon as she was married, and was subject to her son after the death of her husband. What misery! In *Ethics of India*, Edward Hopkins mentions that women were reviled as being "torches that light the way to hell."¹

According to Buddhism, the characteristics of all human beings are the same, both at birth and during their lifetime. Human beings come in two genders and both genders are equally human. The message that the Buddha proclaimed was universally applicable and beneficial for humanity as a whole, without exception, regardless of race, caste, or gender. The goal of liberation is described as a path open not only to men, but to women and men equally.

But, while the change in attitude towards women brought about by the Buddha is widely appreciated, he was not alone in this regard. The Jains also took an "enlightened" attitude towards women. But Jainism, unlike Buddhism,

did not concede the possibility of ultimate spiritual liberation to women. Although a woman could become a man in a future lifetime, she could not achieve liberation in a woman's body. Some, but not all, Jain sects extended their religious orders to women.

The Nature and Status of Women as Depicted in the Pāli Literature

The earliest available teachings of the Buddha are found in the Pāli literature of the Theravāda school, which is widely regarded as the most orthodox Buddhist tradition. In the Pāli *sūtras*, words of praise and also disapproval of women's nature are attributed to the Buddha. But the Buddha's main teaching was a method of education, and not intended to be prejudicial toward women. The Buddha wanted women to escape from suffering, not to capitulate to their weaker instincts. He created conditions for women to enter the path of wisdom and agreed that women are capable to attain *arhat*ship.

In five *sūtra* of the Nikayas, we find the Buddha teaching especially to women. In one *sūtra*, he speaks to Anathapindika's daughter-in-law about the seven kinds of wives and asks her to choose which one she would like to be. In another account, King Pasenadi of Kosala becomes sad when he hears that his queen has given birth to a girl and the Buddha counsels him to feel happy instead. The *Therīgāthā* recounts numerous examples of the contributions of women and describes the lives of women who renounce worldly life and become *arhats*. These accounts illustrate that the status of women in the Buddha's teachings was not lower than men's. The Vinaya *pitaka*, which describes the discipline for the *bhikṣuṇī* and the institution of the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha, also illustrates the lives of women at that time. All these Pāli texts are resources for understanding the nature of women in the Theravāda tradition. From these sources, it is clear that during the time of the Buddha, there were many cases of women from different sectors of society who became *bhikṣuṇī* and it is clear that some of them attained the state of an *arhat*, just as men did.

The Nature and Status of Women as Portrayed in the Mahāyāna Literature

In the Mahāyāna Buddhist literature, we find examples of women who are portrayed as advanced bodhisattvas capable of obtaining the goal of enlightenment. We also find a blurring of the distinction between nuns' and laywomen's roles. Some famous stories in the *Saddharmapundarika Sūtra*, the *Vimalakīrtinīrdesa Sūtra*, the *Astasahasrika-prajñāpramit Sūtra*, and the *Srimalasimhanada Sūtra* depict laywomen, sometimes even eight-year-old girls, who master the profound doctrine, engage in *bodhisattva* practices, and even surpass great *arhats* in wisdom. There are not only cases where a woman

transforms her female body into a male one in order to become a Buddha, but also cases where a woman becomes a *bodhisattva* or a Buddha without changing her female form.

Probably no other *sūtra* presents a clearer depiction of the wise laywomen than the *Srimala Sūtra*. In this *sūtra*, Queen Srimala is the personification of wisdom and dedicated practice. She is capable of the “lion’s roar,” that is, of teaching the ultimate doctrine of universal salvation. She is straightforwardly accepted as a true teacher of the Dharma, and the fact that she is female is never an obstacle. As a lay *bodhisattva* at an advanced stage of practice, the idea of sexual transformation is no longer relevant. As an ordinary woman, representing both the feminine and the lay world, she symbolizes the highest development of women’s intellectual, spiritual, and religious potentialities. From this example of a laywoman who is able to achieve the highest goal of Buddhahood, we may conclude that Mahāyāna is a better vehicle for women, particularly for laywomen.

Comparing the Status and Nature of Women in Theravāda and Mahāyāna: A Contemporary Perspective

The viewpoint of the Mahāyāna tradition towards human beings is quite different from that of the Theravāda. While to become an *arhat* is the spiritual goal in Theravāda, in Mahāyāna one aims at becoming a bodhisattva and eventually a Buddha. Mahāyāna means “great vehicle,” in contrast to Hinayāna, or “small vehicle.” The idea is that the Mahāyāna vehicle is large enough to carry all beings to salvation, while the small vehicle of the Hinayāna can carry only a few. The Mahāyāna traditions today take a more liberal and modern view toward human beings, making the Mahāyāna a more appropriate viewpoint for progress in society. Therefore, the Mahāyāna school is spreading quickly. One example of this is the large number of *bhikṣuṇīs* in such countries as China, Taiwan, Korea, and Vietnam.

At present, the Theravāda tradition is followed in Sri Lanka, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar. But these traditions have no *bhikṣuṇīs*. Because of this, the Theravāda tradition is viewed as narrow and in apparent contradiction to the Buddha’s teachings. Although the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha existed during the Buddha’s time and the *bhikṣuṇī* precepts are included in the Vinaya section of the Pāli canon, there is little support for the reestablishment of the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha today in Theravāda countries. From the Vinaya literature, it is clear that, from the Buddha’s time until it died out, the Theravāda and related schools had a Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha. From a contemporary perspective, the disappearance of *bhikṣuṇīs* from the Saṅgha in Theravāda countries is a telling absence and has limited the development of the Buddha’s teachings.

In the present day, social progress requires gender equality. The Buddhist teachings also attach importance to equality between men and women. To be more effective in the modern world, the Theravāda tradition would do well to open its doors and accept the *bhikkṣuṇīs* ordination, instead of only allowing nuns to take the eight or ten basic precepts of a Buddhist devotee.

Conclusions

Extensive research on the nature and status of women in Buddhism give a picture that highlights the achievements of the Buddha, the Blessed One who came to the world as a human being, attained enlightenment through diligent practice, taught the doctrine to human beings, and became respected as the “teacher of gods and humans,” due to his compassion and wisdom. An examination of the *sūtras* and Vinaya texts of the Theravāda and Mahāyāna traditions reveals that they are resources for understanding Buddhist perspectives on the nature and status of women. The Theravāda *sūtras* describe both the good and bad traits of women, as well as their achievements. In the Mahāyāna *sūtras*, women are portrayed as advanced *bodhisattvas* fully capable of attaining the final goal of enlightenment. Thus, the sources of both traditions are evidence of the equality that the Buddha brought to both society and religion.

Among the major world religions, Buddhism is notable for the Saṅgha, the large and peaceful communities of monks and nuns, and for the active involvement of many kind and affectionate nuns who act as patrons of these communities. The Buddha opened up new horizons for women by laying the foundations of the Bhikkṣuṇī Saṅgha. The social and spiritual advances he initiated were ahead of their time and have continued up to the present time, unique among world religions.

Many erudite scholars have discussed this topic from different angles and their writings provide valuable information for the study of women in Buddhism. However, according to my analysis of the nature and status of women in the Buddha’s teachings, it seems unreasonable and incompatible for the Buddha to have justified male dominance. In one interpretation or another, all beings have the Buddha nature or the potential to become awakened. Over a period of almost 26 centuries, the Buddha’s noble teachings have provided valuable advice for many human societies – moral lessons that, if applied, can help human beings, both women and men, to end all suffering and attain real happiness in the world. These achievements are possible for anyone who recognizes the value of the Buddha’s teachings.

NOTES

1. Edward Washburn Hopkins, *Ethics of India* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1924).





Sexuality in Theravāda Buddhism: Wives, Widows, and Divorcees

Hema Goonatilake

In any society, sexuality and gender roles are socially and culturally constructed, assigned on the basis of access to power and authority. Access to power and authority is determined by the traditions and customs in a society. This paper discusses the greater equality and authority accorded to women in the Buddha's time and how this ethos of equality has influenced Theravāda Buddhist societies such as Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos up to the present day. Early Pāli Buddhist literature is replete with references showing that women began to enjoy more equality and to exercise greater authority under Buddhism, especially in the domestic, social, and religious spheres. Our discussion here is confined to the domestic and social.

Status of Women in Early Buddhism

At the time the Buddha appeared in India in the sixth century B.C.E., the status of woman had declined owing to the domination of the *brahmins*, the priestly caste. The position of women was low and they were considered the property of man, as reflected in the *Laws of Manu*: "The woman would never enjoy independence and a life of her own; when young, she is subservient to her father, when married, to her husband and, in old age, to her son."

The birth of a son had a special significance. The happiness of a man after death was ensured only by the due performance of his funeral rites by his son. A woman was honored if she was a mother of a son: "By a son a man conquers the world; by a son's son, he enjoys immortality and afterward, by the son of a grandson, he reaches the solar abode."¹

In contrast to these prevailing views of woman, the Buddha redefined the role and status of women, not only by enhancing her role as mother, wife, and daughter, but also by opening new paths for women to become teach-

ers, community leaders, mendicants, and seekers of liberation on a par with men.² The Buddha elevated the status of women, which had declined under the dominance of the *brahmins*. Widows and divorcees ceased to be despised and viewed as encumbrances. Matrimony was no longer held to be woman's only achievement and women who did not marry were no longer regarded as shameful. Widows and divorcees were not denigrated and were not excluded from domestic festivities on the suspicion that they were ill omens. Horner discusses the position of wife and widow as reflected in early Pāli Buddhist literature:

As wife, a woman was no mere household drudge, but she had considerable authority in the home, ranked as her husband's helpmate, companion and guardian, and in matters both temporal and spiritual, was regarded as his equal and worthy of respect... As a widow, she went on her way unabused, free from any suspicion of ill-omen, not excluded from the domestic festivities, probably capable of inheriting property, and certainly of managing it... Under Buddhism, more than ever before, she was an individual in command of her own life until the dissolution of the body.³

Marriage, Divorce, and Re-marriage

In Buddhism, marriage is not a sacrament, but purely a secular affair with no religious sanction. The same is true of divorce. The act of contracting or dissolving a marriage is settled by the individuals involved or their families. There are no Buddhist legal codes similar to the *Laws of Manu* or Muslim *sharia* law. Nor is there any religious or social obstacle to re-marriage for women. There are numerous references to re-marriage in Buddhist literature. Isidasi married one husband after another and, from the absence of contemporary comment on her conduct, it may be inferred that she did not contravene any accepted social behavior. Extreme forms of female seclusion such as *purdah* or child marriage have never existed in Buddhist lands.

Buddhist Attitudes toward Sexual Misconduct

Total sexual abstinence or celibacy is compulsory only for Buddhist monks and nuns and for those who observe the ten precepts. For monks and nuns, sexual intercourse, whether heterosexual or homosexual, demands exclusion from the religious community. For Buddhist laymen and laywomen, sex is viewed as an expression of conjugal love and a satisfying emotional experience. Sexual pleasure is not "sinful" or "shameful" for a layperson. Neither rigid pu-

ritanism nor total permissiveness is advocated in Buddhism. For the laity, it is abstinence from sexual *misconduct* that is required.

The precept regulating sexual behavior for the laity, “I vow to abstain from sexual misconduct,” applies equally to both men and women. In order of priority, this precept comes third. The first, to refrain from taking life, and the second, to refrain from stealing, are two of the main principles set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: the right to life and the right to property. The fourth and fifth precepts are to refrain from speaking lies and to refrain from intoxicants. Adherence to the five precepts ensures safely and confidence for those living the household life.

In the Buddhist texts, sexual misconduct is described as: “The volition (*ce-tana*) with sexual intent occurring through the bodily door performed with an improper partner.”⁴ An “improper” partner is defined as having sexual relations with the following categories of women: (1) those who are protected by their mother, parents, brother, sister, or those who have a husband; (2) those who are betrothed; and (3) women who have been bought or hired for a payment, such as slaves and workers.

During the Buddha’s time, monogamy appears to be the accepted system of marriage, although polygamy was a customary right of kings, nobles, and those who could afford to support more than one wife. The Buddha prohibited adultery in the context of monogamy, polyandry, or other forms of marriage. In the *Parabhava Sutta*, he states, “Let the wise man avoid an unchaste life, as a burning heap of coals; not being able to live a life of chastity, let him not transgress with another man’s wife.”⁵ The Buddha identified adultery as one of the causes of man’s downfall: “Not contented with one’s own wives, seeking harlots and wives of others, ...this is the cause of one’s downfall.”⁶

In the *Mahamangala Sutta*, the Buddha taught that it is a blessing to be able to support and cherish one’s wife and children. Chastity and fidelity to one’s partner have been considered ideal forms of behavior for a successful married life. The essential virtues that ensure conjugal happiness, as described by the Buddha, are mutual confidence (*saddha*), morality (*sila*), self-denial (*caga*), and wisdom (*pañña*). The *Sutta Nipāta* states, “Be satisfied with one wife” and “Do not go to another’s wife.”⁷ From these statements, it is clear that the type of marital life recommended by the Buddha was monogamy and that adulterous relations with another’s wife (and, by extension, with other women) are condemned.

The situation of a woman having to share a house with another woman was considered woeful. Kisa Gothami describes her plight as “woeful when sharing a home with another wife (*sapattikam pi dukkham*).” Sentiments like these, expressed by several women, are recorded in the Buddhist literature. One of the five conditions woman wish for is to dwell in a home without another

wife. It is important to note here that men violate the principle of conjugal fidelity more frequently than women.

No Double Standards for Chastity in Buddhism

The *Laws of Manu* state, “Although the husband is immoral, lustful in behavior, and devoid of good qualities, the wife should wait on him, always regarding him highly as a god.” In contrast, in Buddhism men and women were both expected to be chaste, both before and after marriage. *Brahmacarya* (celibacy), which was expected for students in the first stage of life (*ashrama*) in the Brahmanical religious tradition, was accepted by the Buddhists as a norm and a foundation for chastity before marriage. After marriage, the marriage agreement was considered a two-way contract involving mutual chastity and fidelity. Sexual gratification was to be found within the socially recognized institution of marriage.

In the *Singalovada Sutta*, which is considered to be the Buddhist moral code for the laity, both husband and wife are advised to be faithful to each other. This discourse of the Buddha introduced a new dimension, one of mutual performance of duties, to the personal relationship norms between husband and wife, employer and employee, parents and children, and so on. The husband’s duties to his wife are to: (1) honor and respect her; (2) love and be faithful to her; (3) secure her position and comfort; (4) hand over authority to her; and (5) provide her with clothing and jewelry. The wife’s duties to her husband are to: (1) love him; (2) supervise and look after the household affairs; (3) be hospitable to relatives on both sides; (4) be faithful to her husband; and (5) protect family acquisitions, discharging all activities with skill and energy.⁸ These injunctions indicate the respect that was expected toward women, not only as mothers of sons, but as members of households. It also reflects the mutual love and faithfulness expected between husbands and wives.

Textual references to Nakulamata (the mother of Nakula) and Nakulapita (the father of Nakula) in the Buddhist literature provide role models of a happy husband and wife. The Buddha often expressed appreciation for Nakula’s mother both as a counselor and as a teacher to her husband. Elsewhere, the Buddha declares that a wife is the best friend of her husband⁹ and that a couple should work together with mutual understanding and friendship.

Violence Against Women by Men and Vice Versa in Early Buddhism

There are very few records of rape in the Buddhist writings. The best known case is that of Uppalavanna, one of the two chief female disciples of the Buddha.¹⁰ The story of Uppalavanna’s rape is particularly important because it led to the Buddha’s formulation of a rule to be observed by the nuns. Ac-

cording to the story, Uppalavanna was the daughter of a financier and was so renowned for her beauty that many men wanted to marry her. With a view to avoiding conflict between contenders, her father suggested that she leave the household life. She was overjoyed, because she was already drawn to the Buddhist way of life and had a cousin who was in love with her. When he heard that she had become a nun and was living in a hut alone in the woods practicing meditation, he went to the hut while she was out and hid himself under her bed. When Uppalavanna returned and laid down on her bed, he raped her. When the Buddha was told about this episode, he made a rule stipulating that nuns should not go out alone without a companion nun or reside in the forest.¹¹

There is another reference to a rape that led to pregnancy. A woman was not allowed to join the order if she knew she was pregnant. However, a nun was free to remain in the order if she was pregnant when she joined but was unaware of it. Despite this allowance, the nun Sundarinanda left the order when she realized she was pregnant after having been raped.¹²

There are also references to instances where monks raped nuns. The novice monk Kandaka raped the nun Kandaka. The *Vinayapitaka* contains several references to monks who made efforts to secure sexual favors from nuns or other women.¹³

In another episode, a nun was approached by a man who solicited sexual favors. When the nun Subha entered the woods to meditate, she encountered a young man who was infatuated by her beauty and stood obstructing her way. He pleaded with her to indulge in sensual pleasures with him. She tried to stop him from obstructing her, saying that she had overcome all passions. He replied:

Your eyes are like those of a doe
Like those of a spirit inside a mountain,
They excite me.
They are like the bud of a blue lotus,
Pure, shining.
I am aroused more than before.

Subha's answer was:

You are heading down the wrong path.
Blind man, you are chasing an empty thing,
An illusion, a tree of gold at the end of a dream,
A puppet show in a crowd.
An eye is just a little ball in a socket
With a bubble in the middle,
Tears, secretions.

Subha then plucked out her eye and held it out to give to him, saying, “Here take this eye.” The young man’s passion died immediately and he begged her forgiveness.¹⁴

There were also instances where women made attempts to seduce men. Vimala, a courtesan became attracted to the monk as he was going on his alms-round. She then went to his dwelling and tried to seduce him. Her attempt at seduction did not succeed, because Moggallana had reached the fourth stage of attainment. Instead, he succeeded in leading her on the path to liberation.¹⁵ In another episode, a woman running a guesthouse made sexual advances toward the monk Anuruddha when he stayed there for the night.¹⁶ This led to the formation of a disciplinary rule for the monks.

Cases of incest were also reported. There is a story about a mother and a son, both ordained, who spent the rains retreat in the same city and were in constant contact with each other, which ultimately led to sexual intercourse. As a result of this incident, a disciplinary rule forbidding incestuous relationships was formulated.

Although there are a few references in Buddhist literature to misdemeanors among the nuns, it appears that “they conducted themselves well.” As revealed in the *Therīgāthā* commentary, this was primarily because their decision to leave the household life (*pabbajja*) was motivated by a sincere desire to end suffering (*dukkha*). They were “women of sincere aspirations and earnest will, seeking the More, the Better in life.”¹⁷ Practically all the nuns “seem sincerely to have felt the force of the doctrine or the force of disagreeable circumstances” of lay life.¹⁸

Buddhist Liberal Attitudes Continue

The liberal attitudes toward women evident during the Buddha’s time continued down through the ages in Buddhist lands such as Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos,¹⁹ attitudes that prevail up to now. A document dated 1769, presented by the Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka in response to queries made by the Dutch governor on marriage and divorce, reveals that men and women had to prove similar grounds to get a divorce. According to Robert Knox, who spent 19 years in a village in Sri Lanka in the eighteenth century, peasants did not resort to legal procedures if they were incompatible. Instead, he said, “[If they] dislike one another, they part without disgrace.” In case of divorce, the wife recovered all the wealth her husband had received from her parents and half of all the property acquired by the couple after marriage.²⁰

In Burma, before the advent of the British, a woman could get a divorce if her husband mistreated her or if he could not maintain her. A man could get a divorce if his wife was sterile or unfaithful. An easy method was for the ag-

grieved party to seek refuge in monastic life, which automatically dissolves the marriage.²¹

The situation in Thailand was similar. A French envoy to the Siamese Court remarked in 1687, “The husband is naturally the master of divorce, but he never refuses it, when she absolutely desires it. He restores her portion to her, and their children are divided among them in this manner...”²² In these Buddhist countries, the rights of women to divorce and to maintain property continue up to the present day.

European visitors to Sri Lanka, Burma, and Thailand in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries recorded their observations of liberal attitudes towards women. Hugh Boyd, who came to Sri Lanka in 1782 as an envoy to the court of Kandy, wrote:

The Cingalese women are not merely the slaves and mistresses, but in many respects, the companions and friends of their husbands... polygamy being unknown and divorce permitted among the Cingalese, the men have none of that constitutional jealousy which has given birth to the voluptuous and unmanly disposition that is practised over the weaker sex in the most enlightened nations, and sanctioned by the various religions of Asia. The Cingalese neither keep their women in confinement, nor impose on them any humiliating restraints.²³

In 1878 the Chief Commissioner of British Burma and Agent to the Viceroy and Governor General of India, Lieutenant General Albert Fytche, remarked:

She is not the mere slave of passion, but has equal rights and is the recognized and duly honoured helpmate of man, and in fact, bears a more prominent share in the transactions of the more ordinary affairs of life than is the case perhaps with any other people, either eastern or western.²⁴

Some observers attributed the prevailing liberal attitudes towards women to the influence of Buddhism. In 1902, an educational advisor to the Government of Siam named J. C. D. Cambell wrote:

In Siam, at any rate, whatever be the causes, the position of women is, on the whole, a healthy one, and contrasts favourably with among most other oriental people....It can be said of Buddhism, that its influence has at least been all on the right side; and when we remember the thousand arguments that have been advanced in the name of both religion and morality to degrade and debate the weaker sex. This is indeed saying much to its credit.²⁵

Reports of women's position in some non-Theravāda was reported were equally positive. In 1928 Sir Charles Bell, a British political representative in Tibet, Bhutan, and Sikkim wrote:

When a traveller enters Tibet, from the neighbouring nations of China and India, few things impress him more vigorously or more deeply than the position of the Tibetan women. They are not kept in seclusion as are Indian women. Accustomed to mix with the other sex, throughout their lives, they are at ease with men and can hold their own as well, as women in the world... And the solid fact remains that in Buddhist countries, women hold remarkably good position. Burma, Ceylon and Tibet exhibit the same picture.²⁶

Sexuality and Sexual Violence in Present-day Buddhist Societies

Due to the spread of Hinduism, most of the countries mentioned above were influenced by the Hindu *Manavadharmaśāstra*. Furthermore, the classical court literatures of these countries followed the poetic traditions and ideologies regarding women found in the Sanskrit literature of India. As a result, Buddhist ideas became interwoven with Hindu beliefs and practices. These literary works and ideologies made an indelible impact on and were reflected in only one class of society, however, the court elite and scholars. They had no influence on the masses of ordinary rural folk. In fact, the vast majority of people had their own folk literature that depicted the contemporary ethos in which women enjoyed freedom at both the domestic and social levels.²⁷ To cite an example, Sita, the heroine of the *Ramayana*, the Indian classical epic, remained the embodiment of conventional women's virtues at court for centuries, but had virtually no influence on ordinary folk in Sri Lanka.

Today in Buddhist countries, like during the Buddha's time, neither marriage nor divorce has religious significance, although Buddhist monks are generally invited to bless the couple before the formal wedding ceremony. Virginity before marriage is generally considered a great virtue for women, unlike for men. Arranged marriages, which were traditionally the norm for women in all these countries, is being fast replaced by love marriage, often with the consent of the parents.

In Theravāda countries, there is no discrimination against girl children before birth or after birth as is found in India, where amniocentesis testing is widely used to detect the sex of the fetus and abort it if it is female. On the contrary, in Theravāda Buddhist countries today, a daughter's birth is most welcome. Perhaps the lack of discrimination against girls in Sri Lanka reflects the expectation that a daughter will assist her mother in taking care of the

family and will take good care of her parents in their old age. In Sri Lanka, a family with a daughter as the first child, is considered fortunate. Furthermore, it is the seniority in age among siblings, irrespective of the sex that counts in assuming decision-making powers in the family. However, the eldest sister generally has a special place, as indicated by the popular proverb, “An eldest sister is a second mother.” It may be mentioned here that in Thailand, in recent decades, the birth of a girl child is said to bring joy to the family for a different reason, i.e., the girl when grown up, will make poor families rich after becoming a prostitute.

Religious traditions tend to lose their original strength and meaning as political, economic, and social structures reach greater complexity. In traditional societies, where the Buddhist temples were the educational, social, and cultural centers, although men were more active in the public domain, both men and women participated in all activities. Although there was a gender division of labor, women worked alongside men in the rice fields and in home-based industries.

After the advent of western colonialism (except in the case of Thailand which later came under strong American influence), Western-style factory production was introduced, and women began to be exploited more than men, receiving lower wages than men for similar work. Urbanization and modernization brought new forms of exploitation. In the cities of some countries, new forms of entertainment and leisure, such as night clubs, casinos, and massage parlors proliferated. Women became employed as bar girls, go-go dancers, and masseurs, which often amounts to prostitution. Prostitution, which has existed in Asian societies from time immemorial in limited measure, grew to an unprecedented scale due to organized transnational tourism. The trafficking of girls and women has added a new dimension to the prostitution trade in Southeast Asian Buddhist countries. Girls are sometimes sold for prostitution by their parents as a survival strategy. HIV/AIDS is the newest and the most dangerous social phenomenon affecting these countries.²⁸

Thailand has earned a reputation for an unprecedented growth of prostitution and also for the spread of HIV/AIDS. The proposition that Khin Thitsa mentions in her book, *Providence and Prostitution: Image and Reality for Women in Buddhist Thailand*, is pertinent here.²⁹ Her argument is that the Buddhist emphasis on merit-making facilitated the practice of prostitution in Thailand, in this case, woman making merit by rendering service with her body. However, when one considers the context in which prostitution assumed such enormous proportions in Thailand, Khin Thitsa's argument is not tenable. Prostitution in Thailand grew with the arrival of the Chinese in the mid-nineteenth century, and the presence of American troops during the Pacific War, the Korean War, and finally the Vietnam War during the 1960s. Under similar circumstances,

prostitution also grew in the Philippines, a Catholic country. Thus, it is not the case that Buddhist ethics have facilitated the spread of prostitution, but rather that the socio-economic situation resulting from global trends has been embraced by the power structures in these countries. Adherence to Buddhist ethics could reduce the spread of prostitution. Observing the third precept by abstaining from sexual misconduct by practicing monogamy, a universally accepted sexual behaviour, remains the only way to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS.³⁰

Conclusion

In reference to sexuality, Buddhist formal theory and ideology include full equality between men and women. In a teaching that advocates the well-being of all sentient beings, including all animals, there is no place for discrimination against women. Nevertheless, the way the Buddhist precepts have been applied in practice in different contexts has resulted in variations from these norms.

NOTES

1. G. Buhler, *Laws of Manu IX, Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. XXV (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1866), p. 137.
2. Hema Goonatillake, "Protests, Struggles and the Reinterpretation of Orthodoxy in Sri Lanka," *Mixed Blessings: Gender and Religious Fundamentalism Cross Culturally*, ed. Judy Brink and Joan Mencher (New York: Routledge, 1995).
3. I. B. Horner, *Women under Primitive Buddhism: Laywomen and Almswomen* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1999), p. 3.
4. *Majjhimanikaya Atthakatha*, Vol. I (London: Pali Text Society), p. 202.
5. *Sutta Nipāta*, p. 345.
6. Ibid.
7. *Ekaya bhariyaya ca hohi tuttho and parassa daram natikkameyya, Sutta Nipāta* v. 396.
8. T. W. Rhys Davids, trans., *Dialogues of the Buddha*, Part III (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2000).
9. *Bhariya'va parama sakha*.
10. The status of Uppalavanna was equivalent to that of the Buddha's two chief male disciples, Sariputta and Moggallana. It is important to note that all the ranks and designations that were conferred to the monks, based on intellectual and spiritual attainments, were conferred on the nuns as well.
11. Susan Murcott, *The First Buddhist Women: Translations and Commentaries on the Therīgāthā* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1991), p. 70.

12. Vinaya IV, 216, quoted in L. P. N. Perera, *Sexuality in Ancient India: A Study Based on the Pali Vinayapitaka* (Colombo, 1993), p. 108.
13. L. P. N. Perera, *Sexuality in Ancient India: A Study Based on the Pali Vinayapiaka* (Kelaniya: Postgraduate Institute of Pali and Buddhist Studies, 1993), p. 94.
14. Murcott, *The First Buddhist Women*, p. 178.
15. Ibid., p. 180.
16. Perera, *Sexuality in Ancient India*, p. 98.
17. Horner, *Women under Primitive Buddhism*, p. xviii.
18. Ibid., p. 96.
19. Lorna S. Dewaraja, *The Position of Women in Buddhism* (Kandy: Wheel Publication No. 280, 1981).
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22. Simon de la Loubere, *The Kingdom of Siam* (London, 1968).
23. Quoted in Dewaraja, *The Position of Women in Buddhism*.
24. Fytche, *Burma: Past and Present*.
25. J. G. D. Campbell, *Siam in the Twentieth Century, Being the Experience and Impressions of a British Officer* (London, 1834).
26. Charles Bell, *The People of Tibet* (London: Oxford, 1928).
27. Hema Goonatilake, *Women in Creative Arts and Mass Media in Sri Lanka* (Colombo, 1979).
28. Hema Goonatilake, "Buddhism and Women in Cambodia: Reclaiming a Lost Legacy," *Cambodia Report: Gender Issues in Contemporary Cambodia* 2:3 (Nov-Dec. 1996).
29. Khin Thitsa, *Providence and Prostitution: Image and Reality for Women in Buddhist Thailand* (London: Change International Reports, 1981).
30. Hema Goonatilake, "Women and Family in Buddhism," *Buddhist Perceptions for Desirable Societies in the Future*, ed. Sulak Sivaraksha (Bangkok: IRCD, 1993).





New Beginnings: The Bhikkhunī Movement in Contemporary Thailand

Tomomi Ito

Scholars of Thailand have explained the structure of Thai society through Theravāda Buddhism, which consists of two groups of Buddhists: the Saṅgha and the laypeople.¹ The Saṅgha, consisting of monks who do not engage in production by themselves, rely on laypeople to supply food, shelter, and all of their economic requirements. Laypeople consider their support for monks as a means for them to gain merit and, by accumulation of merit, the promise of a better rebirth and a better future. In this picture of a Theravāda Buddhist society, it has been taken for granted that the Saṅgha consists only of ordained men, and women are automatically classified as laity.² For a long time, instead of formally being ordained as *bhikkhunīs*, Thai Theravāda women who determine to pursue religious life chose the alternative of becoming *mae chiis* by taking the eight precepts and wearing white robes. However, unlike a *bhikkhunī*, it is unclear whether a *mae chii* is a laywoman or a renunciant.

Abbots and the laypeople who support the temple often insist that a *mae chii* contribute to the temple, because she lives for free in the temple and eats the food that the community of laypeople intended for monks. Then, many *mae chiis* justify their contribution as an exchange for the acquisition of merit. Thus, a *mae chii* in a temple is almost always expected to help cook for monks and novices in order to supplement the insufficient amount of alms food. That means, even in a temple, women cannot refuse the role of cook, just as they used to do in their households.

A *mae chii's* role as a renunciant is hardly emphasized. Of course, just like monks, *mae chiis* chant every day, listen to the abbot's preaching and practise the Dhamma. However, *mae chiis* have to spend a considerable time cooking, washing dishes, preparing the daily menu and preparing late afternoon drinks.

A Thai *samānerī*, who used to be a *mae chii*, said that when it was time to practise meditation, her responsibility for cooking often disturbed her concentration.³ If we compare the position of *mae chiis* with monks and novices, the *mae chiis'* lives as renunciants are much less respected, as they have an ambiguous status between ordained and lay individuals.

There are several examples which show how Thai Buddhist women have been struggling to overcome these unfavourable conditions for their religious practice; the case which this paper will focus on is the recent *bhikkhunī* restoration movement after the ordination of Dr. Chatsumarn Kabilasingsh. On February 6, 2001, Chatsumarn received the ten precepts in Sri Lanka and became a Theravāda *samānerī*. Her ordination as Samānerī Dhammananda was cause for a great deal of public attention, when she was ordained as a *samānerī*.⁴ Because Dhammananda was already well-known as an associate professor specializing in Buddhism at Thammasat, a leading university in Thailand, and also as a public intellectual advocating Thai *bhikkhunī* restoration, the news of her ordination was perhaps more striking than any other woman's.

Although there were some critical comments by a group of conservative monks, and some newspaper reports were written with a suspicious attitude, the overall public reactions that Dhammananda received were not too negative. In my interview with her in March 2002, Dhammananda stated that soon after her ordination, some people reacted negatively, but a year later, the same people became neutral regarding the issue. She also noted that her temple now receives ten times more support than before her ordination.⁵

In addition to Dhammananda's individual efforts, important support has been provided by a group of progressive Buddhist monks and lay men and women, called the INEB (International Network of Engaged Buddhists). Samānerī Dhammarakkhita, the third Thai *samānerī*, spent nine years of her life as a *mae chii* with little concern about society outside her temple. She did not even hear the news of Dhammananda's ordination until Ven. Luang Pho Kosin came to her temple and explained it to her. Kosin was a member of INEB and has been giving training for *mae chiis* to gain confidence as renunciants and also recently started encouraging *mae chiis'* full ordination as *bhikkhunīs*. Although in the beginning Dhammarakkhita did not easily believe in the *bhikkhunī* restoration movement, she read some books about this issue introduced by Kosin. When she moved to Kosin's temple in November 2001, she finally decided to be ordained as a *samānerī*. It was Kosin, an INEB member, who introduced Dhammarakkhita, formally a Thai *mae chii* in seclusion, to Dhammananda and the international movement for *bhikkhunī* restoration.⁶

On February 10, 2002, the spectacular ordination ceremony took place at Dhammananda's temple located near Bangkok.⁷ This was the first female ordination held in Thailand after an attempt in 1928 was crushed by the

authorities. This ceremony was given a lot of media coverage in Thailand. Curiously many of the reports were rather supportive of her ordination. Only one newspaper criticized it and even concocted a fictitious interview with her in order to stir up a conflict with the Bhikkhu Saṅgha. But according to Dhammananda, quite a few readers protested the report, so after two days the stance of the newspaper changed to a neutral one.⁸

For the future development of the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in Thailand, we should examine at least three groups, with whom the Thai *samānerī* and future *bhikkhunīs* will have important relationships. The first one is their relationship with the Thai public. Supportive opinions expressed by progressive groups, such as INEB, is encouraging for Dhammananda's individual effort to gain momentum and become a social movement. For a further expansion of the movement, an innovative attempt should gain confidence of Thai Buddhists from many different types of social groups. Compared with liberal intellectuals who often actively express their opinions in the public, it might be rather difficult to hear voices of those who have long followed Thai Buddhist tradition and find little need to change what they are familiar with. In order to attain the support of such people, Thai *samānerīs* and future *bhikkhunīs* need to win public confidence in their good practice, to which everyone should pay respect.

Second, Dhammananda's and other future *bhikkhunīs*' relations with the existing Bhikkhu Saṅgha is significant. Even though the Thai media gave a lot of coverage for Dhammananda's and other *samānerīs*' ordination as important issues in Buddhism, the Saṅgha has not announced their standpoint at all. In fact, the Saṅgha cannot legally restrict laywomen, since those whom the Saṅgha can control under its regulations are only monks and novices. If the Thai Saṅgha prohibited Theravāda women from being ordained by Mahāyāna *bhikkhunīs*, this would obviously contradict the principle of religious freedom guaranteed in the Constitution. Also, a Thai monk explained to me that the disapproval of a Buddhist group by the Buddhist authorities means that the group is regarded as heretical. However, even though the religious authorities regard a certain group as heretical, it can still exist under the secular law as a new *nikāya*, unless it violates criminal laws. If there are no means for the existing Saṅgha to control a new *nikāya*, it is taken as showing weakness in the existing Saṅgha.⁹ Even if it is not an intention, the new *nikāya* of *bhikkhunī* could be a challenge to the existing Bhikkhu Saṅgha because it has a possibility to compete with the male monks' Saṅgha for laypeople's faith, and the authority of the Bhikkhu Saṅgha might decline.

Such a possible consequence suggests that the restoration of the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha does not simply mean gender equality for ordination opportunities, but it also means an introduction of some functions that the existing Bhikkhu Saṅgha fails to provide for laypeople. Whether the authorities sanction it or

not, both *bhikkhunīs* and other types of Buddhist women ascetics can identify and fulfil people's religious needs that monks do not meet. Although at the moment quite a few Thai people give moral support to Dhammananda's support of the *bhikkhunī* restoration, the real test would come when the number of Thai *bhikkhunīs* and *samānerīs* increases proportionally to form a community and then seek official Saṅgha recognition of their belonging to the Thai Theravāda Saṅgha.¹⁰ *Bhikkhunīs* and *samānerīs* can do more than just being passively at the mercy of the male Saṅgha but rather be ready to demonstrate their significance in the society in order to gain as much public support as possible.

Lastly, social relationships in monastic communities are important for *samānerīs* and *bhikkhunī*. Since at least at present *bhikkhunī* are in fact a minority group of Buddhist women, some *bhikkhunī* have to live in either a temple where monks are dominant or a nunnery for *mae chiis*, unless they are fortunate enough to have their own temple, like Dhammananda. Since *bhikkhunī* are not officially sanctioned by the Saṅgha, many monk abbots are afraid of possible trouble with the authorities by addressing the *bhikkhunī* issue. Moreover, if there are monks and *mae chiis* who do not respect the higher ordination status of a *samānerī* or *bhikkhunī*, whom they used to treat as their servant, or who has less experience of monastic life but should be given higher seating position than *mae chiis*, being a *bhikkhunī* could even be more difficult than being a *mae chii*.

Outside of a particular monastic community, it is furthermore important to examine the social position of *mae chiis* and the newly ordained women. Both *samānerīs* and *bhikkhunī* are formally ordained women in Buddhism, so their restoration should raise the status of Theravāda Buddhist women in Dhamma practice. However, compared with most of the *mae chiis* living in countryside temples, the two *samānerīs* are relatively advantageous individuals, especially in terms of education. Ven. Phra Paisal Visalo, a monk who supports *bhikkhunī* ordination, emphasized that it is critical to think of the welfare of Thai Buddhist women as a whole, not just *bhikkhunīs* but including *mae chiis* as well.¹¹ The reintroduction of *bhikkhunī* ordination would be truly successful and meaningful for Thai women if the existence of *mae chiis* is not forgotten.

It has been only a year and five months since Dhammananda was ordained as a Theravāda *samānerī*, and the number of Thai *samānerī* is now three in July 2002.¹² The restoration of *bhikkhunī* ordination in Thailand has just begun. In this paper about the *bhikkhunī* restoration movement in Thailand, I examined what has recently occurred as well as what is of concern for its further development. In its social aspect, the Theravāda *bhikkhunī* restoration in Thailand is significant in two ways: as it can offer women an ordination opportunity equal to that of men, and it can affirm the ordained status. For Thai Theravāda Buddhist women, the status of *bhikkhunī* is a considerable

improvement from the ambiguous and thus relatively lower position of *mae chii*. Is the significance of *bhikkhuni* restoration limited to these two issues?

In Thailand, I often hear the same opinion: feminism and the demands for women's rights is egotistical and too aggressive. Some Buddhist women in Dhamma practice told me that demanding higher social status contradicts Buddhist principles and the purpose of ordination. They explained to me that the purpose of Buddhism is to overcome suffering, which arises from attachment, so we should not create another cause of suffering by caring about worldly status. Rather, worldly status should be abandoned when we renounce the world.¹³ Then, are social conditions not worth challenging?

As I mentioned in the beginning, because of the ambiguous ordination status of *mae chiis*, both monks and lay supporters of a temple expect them to do cooking and other tasks, tasks which make it difficult for them to concentrate on Dhamma practice. No matter how high or low the social status is, what Buddhist women need are more opportunities for Dhamma practice. This is an issue common to all kinds of women in Dhamma practice, *mae chiis*, *bhikkhunis*, or others. To become a *bhikkhuni* is one of the most expedient ways for Buddhist public to recognize her as a renunciant, because it is the ordained woman designed by the Buddha. The *bhikkhuni* restoration in Thailand could further facilitate an understanding that women should also have an appropriate path for religious accomplishment.

NOTES

1. For example, S. J. Tambiah, *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in North-East Thailand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); Yoneo Ishii, *Saṅgha, State, and Society: Thai Buddhism in History* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986).
2. Tomomi Ito, "Buddhist Women in Dhamma Practice in Contemporary Thailand: Movements Regarding their Status as World Renunciates," *The Journal of Sophia Asian Studies* 17 (1999): 147-81.
3. Interview with Samāneri Dhammarakkhita, March 20, 2002.
4. In fact, Dhammananda did not publicize her ordination by herself; for a while she remained silent after her return from Sri Lanka. A TV reporter came to her in order to ask for her comment as a specialist on religion, but the program was banned to broadcast for the reason that Dr. Chatsumarn, a woman, took the form of a monk. Her ordination as a Theravāda *samānerī* was then reported to the Thai public when the adequacy of the ban was discussed by media ("TV Gets Flak for Scrapping Two Shows, Female Novice Not Allowed to Air Views," Bangkok Post, April 29, 2001).
5. Interview with Samāneri Dhammananda, March 18, 2002.

6. Interview with Samānerī Dhammarakkhita and Luang Pho Kosin, March 20, 2002.
7. See *Yasodhara: Newsletter on International Buddhist Women's Activities* 18:3 (April-June 2002).
8. Interview with Dhammananda, March 18, 2002.
9. Interview with Phra Paisal Visalo, May 4, 2002.
10. Interview with Dhammananda, March 18, 2002.
11. Interview with Phra Paisal Visalo, May 4, 2002.
12. On February 28, 2003, in Sri Lanka Samānerī Dhammananda was ordained as a *bhikkhuni*, and before August 2003 the numbers of Thai Theravāda *samāneris* living in Thailand increased to four.
13. For example, Mae Chii Dr. Suphaphan na Bangchang. Interview by the author, January 15, 1999, cited in Ito, "Buddhist Women in Dhamma Practice," p. 164.







From Anonymity to Self Reinvention: Korean Buddhist Nuns in the Twentieth Century

Eunsu Cho

The life and culture of Korean Buddhist nuns and laywomen deserves serious attention from scholars to compensate for the dearth of research on the subject, not only in the Western world, but also in Korea. Serious studies of the history of Chinese, Taiwanese, and Japanese Buddhist nuns have already been undertaken, leaving the lack of material and scholarship on Korea a conspicuous lacuna.

Buddhism was officially recognized in Korea in the fourth century and it is believed that the full ordination of nuns and monks began by the middle of the fifth century. The ability of Korean Buddhist nuns to maintain their own religious identity and monastic institutions for more than 1600 years is remarkable and rare. Buddhism flourished during the first millennium of its history in Korea and then struggled to survive during the Choson dynasty (1392–1910). The Choson dynasty looked to Neo-Confucian ideology to organize society and enforced anti-Buddhist policies. Buddhism was suppressed and Buddhist monks and nuns were treated as outcasts. Buddhists suffered self-doubt and were disrespected in public. Buddhist nuns suffered double oppression as both Buddhists and as women. Given these adverse circumstances, Buddhist nuns were encouraged to hide themselves and lead quiet, uneventful lives away from the outside world. Most of them lived and died anonymously, without leaving much information about their lives.

In the late nineteenth century, Choson society experienced pressure to change. An influx of knowledge about other civilizations (mostly Western) influenced Korean intellectuals to appeal for public support for government reform. Reformist politicians led what is known as the Enlightenment Movement. In 1876, Japan opened Korean ports to trade and by the 1890s

Japanese Buddhist sects were sending missionaries to Korea. In 1895, the law banning Buddhist clergy from entering the capital was lifted. Eminent Buddhist thinkers and activists such as Kyong'ho (1849–1912), Yongsong (1864–1940), Man'gong (1871–1946), and Manhae (1879–1944) actively promoted Buddhism as a spiritual force for a new society. Thus, Buddhist society began to change its religious and social outlook and developed a new agenda after centuries of repression by the Confucian influenced Choson dynasty.

Responding to this social change and the revival of Buddhism in new Korea, Buddhist nuns actively attempted to construct a positive image of themselves and of Buddhist practice. Such attempts sometimes complemented the self-strengthening efforts of Korean Buddhist clerical society and sometimes diverged. Two remarkable examples were the *bhikṣuṇīs* Myori Pophui (1887–1974) and Hyech'un (1919–1998). Despite the anecdotal nature of the material I was able to gather, I hope that this account will provide a glimpse into the lives of Korean women teachers – how they lived, practiced, and trained their students.

Myori Pophui Sunim

My study of Korean Buddhist nuns' society at the turn of the twentieth century reveals a multi-layered site of discourses on gender, history, and nation within the context of Japanese colonial domination (1910–1945). These discourses, often contradictory and ambivalent, derive their authority from the newly dominant epistemologies employed by imperialism, colonialism, and modernism. My study focuses on Myori Pophui, the first recognized female Sŏn (Chinese: Chan, Japanese: Zen) master in modern times, and her collaborative efforts to establish the Kyonsong-am Bhikṣuṇī Sŏn meditation hall, the first of its kind and the future home of many distinguished Sŏn-practicing nuns. In this study, I would like to draw a candid portrait of the efforts of Buddhist nuns to construct a variety of alternative subject positions that seem to offer a modicum of certitude and solidity in the face of dramatic social change at the turn of the century. In contrast to the invisibility of nuns in the historiography of modern Korean Buddhism, these records reveal the active engagement of Buddhist nuns carrying out the traditions of meditation practice and strict monastic rules of communal life, and attempting to create a constructive self-image for both themselves and the Buddhist tradition in general. Because such attempts both complemented and stood in tension with the self-strengthening efforts of mainstream male Korean Buddhist clerical society, I will attempt to evaluate how this relationship influenced the continued development of female participation in Korean Buddhism.

Pophui was born in 1887 in Kongju, a rural area in the southern part of Korea. Not much is known about her family background except that she was a second daughter. Based on the story of how she entered the Buddhist order, however, we can tell that she was born into a humble family. When she was three years old, her father died. When she was four years old, her grandmother carried her on her back to a small hermitage in Mit'a-am, a branch hermitage of Tonghak-sa Temple on Mt. Kyeryong. Her mother also came to the hermitage at that time, ordained as a nun, and took the name Tochon. After one year, Pophui's mother felt that living with her daughter would not benefit either of them, and she moved to another monastery, Kap-sa, on the other side of the mountain. When Pophui was eight years old, she heard that her mother had died. From then on, separation and death became the central questions in her life. When she reached the age of 13, she shaved her head and was ordained by Kwiwan. The following year, she received the *śrāmaṇerikā* precepts from Tongun. She received the *bhikṣuṇī* precepts from Haegwang in 1910 when she was 23 years old and returned to Tonghak-sa, where she studied Buddhist scriptures and discourse records of various Son Masters from Master Manu.

Pophui began studying the *Lotus Sūtra* at Chongam Monastery in the southeastern part of Korea under the guidance of Kobong Kyonguk (1890-1961), a renowned teacher of doctrine. Hearing from Kobong about his own teacher Man'gong (1871-1946), she resolved to meet and study with Man'gong. Man'gong was a successor to Kyongho (1849-1912), who has been called a "super-star in modern Korean Buddhism" for his revival of the Korean Sŏn Buddhist tradition, which had been stifled during the Choson dynasty.

Records show that, as Pophui was nearing Chonghye Monastery where Man'gong was teaching, Man'gong had a vision of her coming and came down to greet her outside the gate at the entrance of the mountain. Under Man'gong's guidance, Pophui's practice accelerated. While meditating during an intensive retreat, she experienced the opening of her vision. Upon hearing this news, Man'gong praised her, gave her another dharma name, Myori, and a poem of certification for her awakening. This took place in 1916, when Pophui was only 30 years old. It is sad that we cannot find her own enlightenment song in the records, but Man'gong's certification poem is available and reads thus:

The quietude of everything is the true face of Śākyamuni Buddha.
The place where even quietude is extinct is the true Son master's form. It has been two or three thousand years since the Buddha's passing. The true radiance of the "mysterious principle" [Myori's name] will never be obscured.

Another incident further illustrates the Sŏn practice Myori engaged in

under the guidance of Man'gong. The incident took place when Man'gong was teaching at Sudok-sa, so it probably occurred some time after 1905, the year Man'gong began accepting students. On that day, the Dharma talk was drawn from a *kongan* about "Mahakashapa's flagpole" from *The Gateless Gate* (*Wu-men kuan*), Case 22, in which Ānanda asks Mahakashapa, "The Buddha gave you the golden woven robe of successorship. What else did he give you?" Mahakashapa replies, "Ananda!" "Yes!" answered Ananda. "Knock down the flagpole at the gate!" Mahakashapa says.

At the end of the Dharma talk, Man'gong posed a question out to the audience about the story. Breaking the silence, a nun rose quietly and said, "While a fish is swimming around, the water gets cloudy. While a bird flies in the blue sky, a feather falls down." Man'gong looked around and uttered, "Peach blossoms are floating in the white snow," a phrase by Manhae Han Yongun, a contemporary of Man'gong, who was a famous Sŏn Master and anti-Japanese activist. Man'gong then calmly asked, "Where are the fluttered blossoms?" The same nun came forward again and said: "Now that the snow has melted, there is only a patch of soil." Man'gong praised Pophui saying, "You have gotten that piece of soil!"

The story shows how the Korean Buddhist Sŏn tradition in the twentieth century faithfully and strictly followed the famous old Chan Buddhist tradition of Dharma exchange, a practice which had been popularized during the Sung dynasty in China as a *huatou* method, and had been subsequently transmitted to Korea, where it is known as *hwadu*.

Here I would like to point out the similarity of the relationship between Man'gong and Pophui and that of the famous Sung Ch'an Master Ta-hui Tsung-kao (1089-1163) and his female disciple Bhikṣuṇī Miao-tao (fl. 1134-1155?). Based on a recent study by Miriam Levering, Miaotao is one of two Sung women who, for the first time in an official, imperially sanctioned Chan genealogy, were recognized as Chan masters.² She was the first person of either sex to experience a great awakening using a *huatou* under the guidance of the leading shaper of *kuanhua* (*huatou* introspection) practice in the Linqi Chan lineage, Tahui Tsungkao. His method contributed to the adoption of the *kuanhua* method by the later Korean Sŏn tradition, due to its advocacy by the thirteenth century Sŏn Master Chinul, who founded the traditional Korean Chogye Sŏn order. As a result of her experience, Miaotao became Tahui's first Dharma heir, an important teacher of women, and a participant in the early Southern Sung revival of Linqi Chan. She and her teacher Tahui blazed the way toward a more widespread acceptance of women teachers as lineage holder in Chan. Miaotao's awakening is also known to have confirmed Tahui's belief that the examination of the *huatou* – the critical phrase of a *kung-an* story – was the most effective way of precipitating an experience of awakening. This

realization helped him consolidate his teaching method, which became known as *kanhwa chan*.³

Both Miao-tao and Pophui attained awakening using a *huatou* under the guidance of their teachers. Like Tahui of the Song dynasty, Man'gong of Choson was a fervent advocate of the *kanhwa* method. Following the teaching of his master Kyongho, he claimed that *kanhwa* was the only path to awakening and the focus and final goal of Chan meditation. He emphasized the importance of this method to his students throughout his career, saying that the method of silent illumination might enable one to calm one's mind, but it was incapable of breaking though habits of rational reasoning to reach a non-dualistic experience. Only by undergoing the process of intense meditation on a *hwadu* could awakening be attained. Due to his efforts, *hwadu* introspection became a standard method of practice in modern Korean Sŏn Buddhism.

Man'gong's favorite and most commonly assigned *hwadu* was "*mu*" (Chinese: *wu*). This *kungan* story concerns the response of the famous Tang Chan master Chao-chou (778-897) to the question of whether a dog has Buddha nature. Man'gong defined the word "*chwa-son*," the word for meditation, explaining that "*chwa*" means the serene state in which all illusive thoughts cease, and "*son*" is the awakened and fully alert activity of the original mind that is vigorously observing the critical phrase.

Like Tahui, Man'gong received many *bhikṣuṇīs* and taught them Sŏn meditation. He was the first and most significant master who started accepting female disciples in modern Korea. Man'gong is a key figure in the emergence of twentieth-century women masters in Korea. He is the first male master in modern Korea who has accepted *bhikṣuṇīs* as his own students, trained them in Sŏn practice, and certified them as Sŏn masters. Man'gong's teaching and training of these elite Buddhist nuns lead to a revival of traditional learning and Sŏn meditation among Buddhist nuns in modern Korea. This, in turn, contributed greatly to a revival of the *bhikṣuṇī* order in Korea. Thus, the modern Korean Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha and its tradition of practice originated from Sŏn master Man'gong and his female disciples. Pophui was Man'gong's first *bhikṣuṇī* Dharma heir. In addition to Pophui, Man'gong trained Mansong (1897-1975), Iryop (1896- 1971), and Ongong (1907-1965), to name only a few of the nuns who subsequently became famous *bhikṣuṇīs* and women masters.

Even after her experience of awakening, Pophui did not deviate from her usual schedule of working in the yard during the day and sitting meditation in the evening. Most of time, she practiced *mugon* (silence). She also traveled widely to other monasteries and training centers to meditate and teach disciples throughout the rest of her life. After more than 50 years of teaching and training, she returned in 1966 to Kyonsong-am on Mt. Toksung, which was part of Sudok-sa Monastery where she attained her awakening. There, she

gathered enough *bhikṣuṇīs* and resources to establish a *bhikṣuṇī*-only monastery complex. For the next 10 years, she functioned as the complex's headmaster and devoted herself to training disciples. She gained an impressive reputation and enormous respect as a *Sōn* master, both amongst her own disciples and from other *Sōn* masters. The most eminent *Sōn* masters from then until today – Ch'un-song, Kumo, Chon'gang, Kyongbong, Hyanggok, Kobong and others – visited her for traditional Chan-style Dharma exchanges. Her goal of institutionalizing the training and practice of *bhikṣuṇīs* was realized with the establishment of the Kyonsong-am meditation center, which became the first institutionalized *bhikṣuṇī* *Sōn* meditation retreat center in the modern period. In this, Pophui faithfully followed her teacher Man'gong's lifetime wish that "The *bhikṣus* and *bhikṣuṇī* who want to follow the path of our great teacher the Buddha and accomplish awakening should seek to practice and meditate in an ideal environment. There are three essential elements for practitioners: a place for Dharma practice, a Dharma teacher, and good Dharma friends." Pophui devoted the rest of her life to establishing a religious community of *bhikṣuṇīs* where true practice could be accomplished. As a result of her efforts, monastic training centered on *Sōn* practice became the basis for the Korean *bhikṣuṇī* tradition.

One day, the elderly Pophui casually asked her disciples, "Would fall be better or spring?" They all unanimously replied: "Of course, spring is better." Then the master said: "The day I leave will be same as the day I came." Three days before she died, Pophui gathered her followers and said, "Bodies are coming and going, but with the Dharma body there is no going or coming." She died on the day she had been brought to a monastery on her grandmother's back 85 years before.

Hyech'un Sunim

Hyech'un Sunim lived 30 years after Pophui Sunim. She was born in 1919, in the midst of the Japanese occupation, a year of massive nationwide demonstrations against Japanese colonial rule by Koreans, kindled when 33 leaders of the independence movement issued a Proclamation of Independence. Hyech'un Sunim's father was a judge in a northern province of Korea. After graduating from high school, the highest level of education most girls could aspire to at that time, she prepared for the typical life of a woman of that time. She married a local county magistrate, bore four children, and was leading the life of an ordinary housewife when war broke between South and North Korea in 1950. Her husband was kidnapped to North Korea, and not knowing his whereabouts, she began to wonder about the meaning of life. This dramatic event led her to question the meaning of life. Eventually, she found refuge in Buddhism. Although these beginnings might seem pedestrian, her unusual and

extraordinary character can be seen in the intensity of her meditation practice and her determination to attain awakening upon entering the monastery.

After practicing *Sŏn* meditation for a few years, Hyech'un decided to visit Songch'ol, the most renowned *Sŏn* master of the time. Songch'ol (1912-1993) was living as a recluse in Ch'onje-gul at the time, and he rarely received visitors. Famous for having lived most of his life in a hermitage surrounded by a fence, he was and still is one of the most publicized and mystifying *Sŏn* Masters in modern Korean Buddhist history. As the patriarch of the Chogye Order of Korean Buddhism for two decades preceding his passing, Songch'ol became the spiritual leader of the Korean Buddhist order. He was notorious for having extremely demanding prerequisites for young students inspired to seek a meeting with him. When Hyech'un arrived at Songch'ol's hermitage, he indicated that he did not want to take her as his student and wanted her to leave. Although she had to leave the room, she refused to leave the hermitage. Later that day, she came back and asked to have another audience with Songch'ol through the novice monk who was his attendant, but Songch'ol refused. It was getting dark outside and, since it was mid-winter, the deep valley of the mountain where the hermitage was located was getting cold. Hyech'un sat down under a pine tree near the hermitage, immovable. Suddenly Songch'ol approached and poured a bucket of water over her in the freezing winter night, but she did not move at all. As time passed, the worried novice came by and offered her a blanket, but she refused. She said, "I now am entering my winter retreat (*kyolche*). If I live here, I will live. If I freeze to death here, then I will die." She resolved to begin her own meditation retreat there.

After seven days, Songch'ol delivered a message to her, saying "If you go to Songju-sa and finish 100,000 prostrations, I will accept you as my disciple." She went off right away and finished the prostrations in only one week. That was how she began her relationship with her teacher. The rest of her life consisted of continuous *Sŏn* meditation retreats – 36 summer seasons in total. She participated in the Chogye order's 1954 movement to clear out Japanese Buddhist elements from Korean monasteries by ousting married monks from monasteries belonging to the Chogye order. She also contributed to relief activities for those in need. Most importantly, by devoting herself to teaching and training *bhikṣuṇī* students, she worked to restore the *bhikṣuṇī* training tradition that had been dormant for the previous 500 years. She devoted herself to empowering *bhikṣuṇīs* and enhancing their status in Korean Buddhist society. In 1968, she founded the Udambala Association, which became the National Organization of Korean Buddhist Nuns in 1985. She was the first president of the organization.

Hyech'un passed away at the age of 80. One day after the morning ceremony, she finished a bowl of gruel as usual and said to her disciples, "It is

said that thus we come and thus we go. Coming and going are the same. Fresh wind blows ten thousand *li*. Today the weather is so good.” Those were her final words. Before dawn, she passed away. She left this world as quietly as a traveler with only a small backpack, a robe, and a set of utensils, who vanishes as suddenly as she appears.

Concluding Remarks

Within the contemporary religious landscape of Buddhism, nuns are equal and indispensable partners for monks in many senses, regardless of whether or not they are acknowledged. Like monks, they receive full ordination. In the past, monastic Buddhism was almost entirely a man’s world, but these days radical changes have been taking place. Nuns not only equal the numbers of monks, but they have also proven themselves to be active participants in the tradition in various capacities: as avid meditators, compassionate caretakers for the needy, capable administrators of social welfare facilities, and attentive and powerful leaders of urban Buddhist centers. They organize and participate in rallies demanding democracy in the media, in government policy, and in the Chogye order. They have established a viable monastic community that not only survived near-obliteration, but also powerfully regenerated, as reflected in the order’s sheer numbers, its social activism, and its meditation programs, making Korean nuns one of the most flourishing female monastic communities in the modern Buddhist world.

NOTES

1. The accounts presented here are mostly based on the stories contained in a recently published two-volume anthology of the bibliographies of eminent Korean nuns by Ha Ch’un-saeng, *Katalum ui kot* I and II (*Flowers of Enlightenment*) (Seoul: Yorae Publishing, 1998 and 2001) unless otherwise noted.
2. Miriam Levering, “Miao-tao and Her Teacher Ta-hui,” in *Buddhism in the Sung*, ed. Peter N. Gregory and Daniel A. Getz, Jr. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999), pp. 189-90.
3. The most renowned *bhikṣuṇī* teachers of doctrine in modern Korea – Komryong, Hyeok (1901-1969), and Suok (1902-1966) – were all taught by Paek Yongsong, who was their preceptor as well as a *Sŏn* teacher. The female disciples of Pang Hanam, who taught at Mt. Odaesan, included Mansong and Kuntan.







The Gender Transformation of Guanyin (Kannon) in Medieval Japanese Buddhism

Mariko Namba Walter

This paper explores the religious and historical context for Guanyin (Avalokiteśvara) worship in medieval Japanese Buddhism in relation to gender transformation. It is well-known that Guanyin is often portrayed as a woman in medieval Chinese, Korean, and Japanese Buddhist art and literature. Buddhist traditions often emphasize that women must transform their gender to that of a male in order to achieve *nirvāna*, rather than the reverse. Why and how Guanyin acquired female characteristics, which are considered to be obstacles for enlightenment, is an enigma in East Asian Buddhist history. In this short paper I would like to illustrate how the Japanese came to consider Guanyin as a female deity and her significant role in transforming the monastic institution of the Pure Land sect in the twelfth century. Having seen Guanyin in a dream, the founder of the Jodo Shinshū, Shinran, broke the tradition of celibacy and allowed all the monks of his school to marry. This tradition of married monks continues to the present day. Shinran's breach of celibacy had soteriological significance, since he maintained the principle of universal salvation for all people, ignoring social, moral, and even gender considerations.

Historical Background

Guanyin was introduced to Japan through China and Korea in the early phase of the transmission of Buddhism in the seventh century and intermingled with the Shinto belief in Amaterasu, the primordial creator goddess of Japan.

According to the Chinese Buddhist text *Mohe zhiguan* (594 CE) by Zhiyi, there are six Guanyins: Sacred (*sheng*) Guanyin, Thousand-Armed Guanyin, Horse-Headed Guanyin, Eleven-Faced Guanyin, Cunti Guanyin, and Ruyilun Guanyin. Each Guanyin is assigned to one of the six lower paths (hell, hunger, bestiality, anger, tranquility, and heaven) and responsible for saving the people in these lower realms. In Japan, Guanyin was later believed to have 33 manifestations, which included Indian gods and goddesses such as Indra and Tārā, Guanyins of Chinese origin such as Miao Shan, and Guanyins created from Japanese myths. The fourteenth-century silk paintings of Guanyin *avatars* show many of them depicted as female.¹ In East Asia, images of Guanyin overlapped with the images of Hārītī and Tārā, which were transmitted from India at various time in the development of Buddhism. Tantric deities, which were influenced by Hindu traditions, are also among Guanyin's manifestations.

In Japan, such a synthesis of female divinity and Guanyin took place easily since goddesses had prominent roles in its mythology. The goddess Amaterasu is the primordial goddess of Japan, who created the whole universe. Other female deities also have prominent roles in ancient Japanese myths. According to a folk tradition, Guanyin was identified with the earth mother, who was known as the generative source of human life and agricultural production. Guanyin worship spread among the peasants and merchants alike during the Edo period (1603-1867), when Japan enjoyed relative prosperity and peace under the Tokugawa Shogunate. The pilgrimage places related to Guanyin number more than a hundred and different regions had their own sacred 33 pilgrimage places.² In the eighteenth century, the Guanyin pilgrimage became one of the people's major activities and the number of pilgrims who visited Chichibu Sacred Site near the capital, Edo, peaked at about 80,000. Both male and female devotees with different dreams and desires flocked to worship the Guanyins of their choice. Eventually Guanyin worship became more and more a women's business, a trend which continues today.

Kannon-kō (Chinese: Guanyin Jiang)

In the present day, the tradition of Guanyin worship is still alive all over Japan and in many aspects of Japanese spiritual life. In a Kannon-kō² or Guanyin worship meeting, women of all generations gather together regularly to venerate Guanyin and enjoy a social gathering complete with vegetarian food. Hakuin, who was an earnest devotee of Guanyin, first began the worship gathering of Kannon-kō. He also created women's groups to do the same and later, from the thirteenth century on, the name Kannon-kō was used mainly for such women's gatherings. Women take turns hosting such a celebration in their home once a month or a couple of times a year, depending on local

customs. Men have their own groups, with a fierce-faced Guanyin, called Horse-Headed Guanyin, for their own male gatherings. The Horse-Headed Guanyin was originally a protector deity petitioned to assuage the guilt of those who engaged in the transportation business. The women's Guanyin is called Koyasu-kannon or Guanyin of Easy Delivery, the Chinese Guanyin who carries a child. A local Kannon is considered to be efficacious for a good flow of breast milk and women can actually buy a clay model of breasts on a wooden board as a charm or souvenir for their visit to this Guanyin. Young girls go to a match-maker (*kunayin*) to find a good partner and some women pay homage to a Guanyin of divorce if they wish to terminate their marriages. Women organized pilgrimage trips by themselves to visit the designated 33 Guanyin temples. For a period of several days, they enjoyed hot-water spring baths and trekking with other womenfolk. Thus, Guanyin worship and pilgrimages provided these women with a spiritual purpose as well as an enjoyable social occasion with other women. All these acts of devotion to Guanyin had more than a thousand years of history and show that women had close religious ties with various Guanyins, which helped them to withstand their suffering as women.

Dating the Sexual Transformation of Japanese Guanyin

In early Japanese Buddhist literature, Guanyin, who could be either male or female, was endowed with merciful and impartial qualities. In medieval Buddhist literature, such as the *Nihon ryōi-ki* (Chinese: *Jipen lingyi chi*) (824 CE), Guanyin was depicted as an extremely generous and compassionate *bodhisattva* who takes the sufferings of the common people onto herself in order to relieve their pain. A more popular aspect of Guanyin was described in the *Hokke Gen-gi* (Chinese: *Ho-fa yenchī*) and *Konjyaku Monogatari* (Chinese: *Chinhsi wuyū*) (compiled in the early twelfth century) as a deity who listens and actualizes the earthly desires of the people, such as wishes to have wonderful children and/or wealth. None of the above sources compiled before the twelfth century show Guanyin as having definite feminine or motherly characteristics. Clear evidence of the gender transformation of Guanyin is, however, described in the *Miraculous Records of the Hase Temple* (Chinese: *Changkusi lingyen chi*), a temple which had been considered to be a sacred place of Guanyin from an early period. According to this record dating from the thirteenth century, the Emperor dreamed of a beaming Guanyin with light shining from her whole body, who said:

This world is extremely defiled and only women can bring harmony and peace. Thus I soften this radiating light and will appear as a woman in order to protect the country and benefit the people to eternity.³

Here Guanyin has become the protector deity of the state, like Amaterasu, the primordial mother goddess. Another early example of identifying Guanyin as female is indicated in the ritual held in the same Hase temple. The ritual involves going inside the “womb” object as a part of the ritual. In such a way, the reproductive ability of motherhood becomes sanctified in Guanyin worship.

Motherhood and Sexuality in Guanyin

One of the compelling questions of sexual transformation is what makes Guanyin a feminine deity. Obviously motherhood and child-bearing, as mentioned above, are the most significant aspects of the female Guanyin. Her compassionate nature is often referred to “mother nature” or the all-embracing nature of motherhood. The promotion of such an image of a merciful *bodhisattva* as a mother is not accidental in Buddhist history. Buddhism largely denied women’s sexuality and the only way to express sexuality in Buddhism was through motherhood. The assumption was that a woman had to become a mother to be saved through her son, who would become a monk. Only through her son would she be liberated and attain enlightenment. Thus the ideal of a nurturing and caring mother, who sacrifices everything for her children, had been a convenient metaphor to reinforce such morality for women in medieval Japan. In pre-Buddhist Japan, the ancient texts and mythologies indicate that the Japanese had rather positive attitudes toward sexuality, which was considered sacred. Sex was never treated as shameful, dirty, or sinful. Thus, many ancient rites and festivals had sexual connotations in relation to agricultural production. This ancient idea of feminine sexuality is totally repressed by such medieval Confucian ideas as the “Three Obediences” and the Buddhist idea of the “Five Hindrances” (Chinese: *wuchang*). The Three Obediences dictate that women must obey their father, husband, and son when he matures. According to the *Lotus Sūtra*, the Five Hindrances are that women can never achieve the state of Indra, Brahma, Cakravartin, King of Demons, or a Buddha. These serious gender obstacles to women’s achieving of salvation became especially strong from the Muromachi period (1392 -1573) onwards.

The power and image of Guanyin, however, transcended such an argument of gender justification in Buddhism, as the weak gender to be saved became miraculously transformed into the strong and compassionate goddess Guanyin, who has the power to save all sentient beings, not simply one gender. Guanyin represents not only compassionate motherhood, but also sanctifies sexuality. How did such power become manifested in Guanyin in the history of Buddhism in Japan? I believe that the most prominent example of Guanyin’s power was revealed in Shinran’s dream. In his dream, the male Guanyin made a vow to Shinran that he would transform himself into a beautiful woman and have

sexual intercourse with him, and take care of his life until death. For Shinran, as a young novice, to have a sexual encounter with a woman, not to mention Guanyin, would have been a major offence, even in a dream. Totally shaken in his confidence to complete his 100 days of austerities, he came out from his isolation in the mountain and consulted with Honen, the prominent Pure Land master at that time. Honen's guidance to him was totally affirmative. Shinran, having struggled with the issue of sexuality in Buddhism, married four years after this dream. He regarded his wife, Eshin-ni (Chinese: Huishin-ni), as Guanyin and Eshin-ni also believed him to be an avatar of Guanyin annointed through her dream. Shinran became the founder of the Jodo Shinshū school, which later became the largest Buddhist school in numbers. From the twelfth century until the present day, all the monks of this school married and had families. Japanese monks of other schools were forced to marry in the late nineteenth century, due to the Meiji government's religious policy in favor of Shintoism. In Shinran's case, the decision to marry was a conscious choice arrived at after questioning the meaning of celibacy and discussing the nature of Buddhist precepts with his master Honen. In his dream Guanyin revealed both her sexuality and the forgiving nature of motherhood.

At the time of Shinran, there were many "corrupt" monks who hid their repeated sexual contacts with women. Homosexual affairs were not unknown and there were also child student monks who satisfied the older monks' needs in exchange for Buddhist teachings and favors. Some of these child interns became well-known powerful patriarchs when they grew up and nobody questioned such behavior as being child abuse or criminality at that time. Unlike disputed cases of Catholic priests' pedophilia in the United States and other parts of the world today, Japanese in the medieval period did not raise many eyebrows over such monks' affairs. These activities were considered bad, since they broke the Buddhist precepts, but there were also many monks like Honen, Shinran's teacher, who kept the precepts their whole life. In terms of sexual culture, the Japanese originally had very "permissive" attitudes for the historical and religious reasons I discussed earlier, and many of these shameful monks' stories are told and retold with pity and sympathy by the people, who consider that affairs of passion go beyond reason and monks are not exceptional in such "misdeeds."

In the case of Shinran, the sexuality of Guanyin in his dream is not regarded as just a reflection of his own sexual desire. His teacher, Honen, convinced Shinran that religious truth goes beyond keeping or breaking the precepts. According to the core teaching of Shinran, sinners and bad people (Japanese: *akunin-shōki*, Chinese: *wujen shingchi*) are more qualified to be saved than good people by the power of *nembutsu* chanting. Shinran advocated that the vow of Amitabha is aimed at saving bad people, who will definitely be reborn in

the Land of Bliss because of the power of Amitabha's vow. Shinran, having committed the carnal sin of being a married monk, identified himself as a common mortal with the sufferings of a sinner. In this seemingly simple logic of Honen and Shinran's, one would expect women to be at the top of the list of Amitabha's salvation, since in medieval Japan women were considered to be most sinful of all. The gender aspect of Shinran's teaching was somehow not emphasized at that time, but there is some evidence of women's initiatives in Buddhist practice. For example, Shinran's wife Eshin-ni had her own women followers who held Dharma gatherings regularly.⁴ Nevertheless the emphasis of Shinran's teaching goes beyond gender issues, because the essence of Kamakura Buddhism, whether for Shinran or Nichiren (1222-1282), is the transformation of Buddhist from monastic practice to popular practice open to all levels of society. In the thirteenth century, during the Kamakura period, Japanese Buddhism shifted its emphasis from court-based, monastic institutions to salvation of a cross-section of people in society. For Shinran, the Guanyin dream played a major role in bridging the gap between monks and lay believers. The relative equality of genders and classes on the path to enlightenment stressed by the founders of Kamakura Buddhism was unfortunately forgotten and declined 200 years later during the fifteenth century as women became more bound by the social norms of Confucian values.

From a modern feminist perspective, Guanyin in Shinran's dream does not provide a totally satisfactory view on sexuality. This Guanyin is transformed into a beautiful woman, satisfies his sexual needs, and even promises Shinran to give him divine protection for his whole life. This kind of sexuality is a totally male-centered view. There is a similar myth of Guanyin in China related to a prostitute of Yen-chou who lived in the late eighth century. According to this myth, the woman had sex with any man who asked for it. She later died at the age of 24 (her early death is no wonder, considering her excessive sexual labor) and was identified as Guanyin. This permissive Guanyin reflects men's desire for such women, but not women's. Yet in Shinran's case, Guanyin's sexuality led to the formation of a new school of Buddhism that advocates enlightenment without conditions.

Conclusion

Prejudice and discrimination against femininity and the female body are the reasons for the exclusion of women from salvation in medieval Japanese Buddhism. Nevertheless, if we follow the logic of the advocates of Shinran and Nichiren in Kamakura Buddhism, women more than men needed to be saved and liberated because of such alleged impediments and sufferings. Guanyin provided a by-way to include women on the path to enlightenment, with a

devotional emphasis. The study of the gender transformation of Guanyin is not concerned merely with physical transformation or sexual behavior, but addresses the core issues of salvation for women and men in medieval Japanese Buddhism.

NOTES

1. Martin Palmer and Jay Ramsay with Man-Ho Kwok, *Kuan Yin: Myths and Prophecies of the Chinese Goddess of Compassion* (London: Thorsons, 1995), p. 45.
2. Somehow 33 became a sacred number in Buddhism, perhaps based on the 33 heavens where devas reside, as described in Buddhist texts.
3. Oogoshi Aiko, et al., *Sei sabetsu suru bukkō* (*Buddhism and Sexual Discrimination*) (Kyoto: Hozokan, 1990), p. 161.
4. Kawada Mitsuo, *Kawada mitsuo chosaku shu: Shinran no shiso to hisabetsu min* (*The Collected Works of Kawada Mitsuo*) (Tokyo: Akashi shoten, 1995), pp. 195-214.





Bridging the World's Religions





Love in Any Language

Malia Dominica Wong

“Aloha” is the word we use in Hawai‘i to welcome people, to wish them well, to express our fondness, or heart-love, and to say goodbye. *Aloha‘oe* means “May you be loved.” *Aloha kakou* means “May there be friendship between us.” *Aloha ke Akua* means “May you be blessed with the love of the Divine.” *E aloha kekahi i kekahi* means “Let us love one another as God has loved us.”

I’d like to begin by sharing a song, “Love in Any Language.” So sit back and let the language of music speak to your heart.

Je t’aime, Te amo, Ya tyibya lyublyu, Ani ohevet othka,
I love you. The sounds are all as different as the lands from
which they came, and though our words are all unique,
our hearts are still the same.

Love in any language, straight from the heart,
pulls us all together, never apart;
and once we learn to speak it, all the world will hear,
love in any language fluently spoken here.

We teach the young our differences, yet look how
we’re the same; We love to laugh and dream our dreams,
we know the sting of pain. From Leningrad to Lexington
the farmer loves his land, and daddies all get misty-eyed
to give their daughter’s hand.

Oh, maybe when we realize how much there is to share
we'll find too much in common to pretend it isn't there.
Love in any language, straight from the heart,
pulls us all together, never apart; And once we learn
to speak it, all the world will hear, love in any language
fluently spoken here.

Though the rhetoric of governments may keep us worlds apart,
there's no misinterpreting the language of the heart.¹

We can also express this in sign language. We can feel it with conviction and full mindfulness. We say “I,” but who is this “I”? We say “love,” but what is this “love”? (If we are mirrors of the Divine or Buddha mind, whose love is this?) We say “you,” but who are “you”? (If you are an extension of myself, then “I love my other self” or “I love you within myself.”)

I:	Love:	You (plural):
Point the index finger to the center of the chest	Hold both hands in a fist with the thumbs sticking out (letter “a”). Cross the arms of both hands at wrists, palms toward body, across chest (like a hug)	Point the index finger outward, moving it from right to left in front of the body

I remember Taiwan with much love in my heart. I lived in the southern city of Tainan for almost five years. I studied Mandarin at Cheng Kung University, and taught English Conversation at Sheng Kung Girls School. When I got sick, I was taxied down to St. Joseph’s Hospital in Kaohsiung where my appendix decided it wanted to come out and be left here. I was surprised when the doctor asked me if I wanted to have acupuncture as a local anesthetic, or a spinal one that would put me totally out. Being a Westerner (American-born Chinese), I did not want to be conscious when the surgery was performed.

After I left Taiwan in 1992, I went to the Philippines where I helped out in the formation program of our novices. I also had the opportunity to return to St. Rose of Lima School in Bacolod City on the island of Negros, where I had my first teaching experience. I remember one day riding a tricycle cab through the streets and coming upon a most beautiful, simple temple with flowing roof line pointing to the heavens. I got off the tricycle cab and walked up the front stairs to the main hall. I felt like I was back in Taiwan. Inside, I made my

prostrations, offered some incense, and began to sit. “Ahh...how good it is to be here,” I thought to myself. After a while I went downstairs and noticed a little nun in dark brown robes pedal in on a bike. “Oh!” That was an interesting sight. She walked towards me. Assuming she was Chinese, I began to speak in broken Mandarin: “How are you. I’m only looking around. When I was in Taiwan, I often went to the temple. It’s very peaceful.” She just looked at me. Then she started speaking in Taiwanese. “Wo bu dung.” (“I don’t understand.”), I quickly responded, but evidently she could only speak Taiwanese. I was about to get nervous, but her elderly smile told me not to.

The nun motioned for me to wait. I watched as she disappeared into the sugar cane patch near the mural of the life story of Buddha on the walls. She came back with a snack of two stalks of red-skinned sugar cane and began peeling them. How my heart jumped with memories of eating fresh sugar cane with the Sheng Kung sisters. She offered me a stalk of sugar cane and we sat in silence eating the sweet, drippy delicacy. As the sun began to set and I needed to get back to my convent, we looked at each other. Using my hands as visual aids, I said: “You don’t know Mandarin. I don’t know Taiwanese. But our hearts know.” She nodded in affirmation, her eyes glistening bright and deep.

The next time I visited Fa Tzang temple, I met two other nuns. They could speak Mandarin. With them I joined in some of their services, helped feed the poor from the back door of the temple, and partook of their table – precious vegetables, buns, rice, and abundant tea.

One day as I was finishing teaching a class at St. Rose, I heard one of the working students shout out that some Buddhists were by the gate. Could it be? My heart raced and my legs followed. Bearing gifts of large cans of powdered milk and biscuits, they said that they wanted to see where I worshiped and worked. It is hard to describe the fullness of my heart as I took them around and showed them the school and our chapel. Building bridges among the world’s religions. Love in any language, straight from the heart.

A few weeks ago I had dinner with one of my professors. We met at the Siddha Yoga Meditation Center in Oakland, California. This center is a branch of Guru Mai’s work of the Hindu tradition. As we were talking about recent, troubling world events, Mary, an Episcopalian who almost took ordination, asked me, “Where are the great spiritual leaders in the world today?” Earlier she had referred to Mother Teresa of Calcutta and the great influence she had building bridges of humanitarian service and unconditional love around the world. I answered, “the Dalai Lama.” She agreed, but continued her probing. “What about great women?” I easily offered “Amma-ji,” a Hindu mystic known as the “hugging saint” for her acceptance of people of all walks of life into the heart of the Divine Mother. Mary continued to press further, however, saying, “Not global enough.” I paused, put my fork down, looked at her, and said,

“Then it’s up to you and me.”

Bridging worlds through bridging the world’s religions is up to the artistry of you and your Saṅghas and me and my communities. To build a bridge takes someone with a dream or a vision, a creative plan, who will follow through in action. Just looking at the mammoth bridges around us inspires a sense of awe and wonder. We can do anything.

In 1893, religious leaders from the world’s major traditions gathered together beginning a series of interfaith dialogues at the visionary World’s Parliament of Religions. One hundred years later, the Council for a Parliament of the World’s Religions was formed. In 1993 and 1999, leaders from the indigenous religions of African Traditional, Zulu Traditional, Native American Spirituality, and Shintoism gathered with leaders of world religions – Baha’i, Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Sikhism, Taoism, and Zoroastrianism – in drafting an initial declaration called Towards a Global Ethic. Other religious families, movements, and branches, such as Swedenborgianism, Theosophy, the Unification Church, the Unitarian Universalists Church, and Wicca also shared their bridge-making ideas. Of the many questions that were addressed, three were key: (1) What is the place in our faith traditions of new revelation, wisdom, or understanding concerning human participation in our common future on Earth? (2) What does the wisdom of our faith traditions teach us about hatred and violence against those who differ in faith, culture, race, or gender? (3) What do we or our faith traditions offer as an alternative vision for living peacefully and sustainably together with others and with the Earth?

A response to this last question was: “Far from putting their trust in technology, governments, or economic systems, the participants (of the Council) from religious, scientific, and non-governmental agencies have all identified *change of heart* as a necessary characteristic of the next phase of personal, corporate, religious and cultural history.”² In order for any true transformation to occur, a change of heart is necessary, just like the song “Let There Be Peace on Earth” stirs us, especially when it continues, “and let it begin with me.” We can continue to talk about the world and its problems, wait until our leaders do something, or frame written declarations in gold and hang them on our walls to gather dust and fade. But until we allow our hearts to speak, and follow through with right action, each world religion will remain as a separate island. We can just look around us. Isn’t it amazing how we have all gathered here, from many islands, on this hilltop campus of Huafan University, to share our concerns and hopes?

So, let’s pause a moment to check our own hearts, because the work of building bridges begins with you and me. The Sufi tradition breathes of its inner connection with the Divine Beloved. It’s like the sacred *ha* in the Hawaiian

tradition, *alo-ha*, where we share the breath of life, spirit. Without the wind of life, we cannot share life. If you take your hand and place it over your heart, you can feel the beat, which is the heartbeat of Mother Earth, the beat of the universe coming into being, the beat of your own gift of life, the sacred sound born of the loving union of your parents. You can take a deep breath and repeat the word “beloved,” like a mantra, as you continue to feel your heartbeat. Just let the word and the sound dissolve into the moment: “Beloved, beloved, beloved, beloved....” If we feel it, we can begin to believe it. For some, the experience may be the first time we’ve acknowledge to ourselves how loved we are. For others, the experience may be uncomfortable. Why? Maybe we need to see ourselves as the object of our practice. And some of us may have already dissolved into the reality of the nonduality that we are: “Love, Lover, Beloved.”

We can also use sign language to build bridges of communication. Turn to the person on your left and hold up three bridge-building fingers. First, hold up your second finger, which in sign language is a shortcut for “i.” Next, hold up your thumb, which is a sign language shortcut for the letter “l.” Last, hold up your little finger, a sign language shortcut for the letter “y.” That spells “I love you.” Turn to your right and wave your message to that person, then look behind you and open your heart. If you put down your second finger, you make the Hawaiian sign for “shaka,” meaning everything is all right, good. We are all bridge builders among the different Buddhist traditions and other faiths. Love, like peace, needs to begin with ourselves. Now let’s learn some other words for love.

Agape. In the Christian tradition, the spiritual love of one Christian to another follows the example of Christ’s love for humankind, which was expressed in the breaking of bread around the communal table. Even in Jesus’ time, with the knowledge that Judas would betray him, no one was excluded from the table. Of this type of love, St. Paul says, “If I speak in human and angelic tongues, but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge, if I have all faith so as to move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. Love is not jealous, or pompous, or inflated, or rude. It does not seek its own interests, is not quick-tempered, does not brood over injury, does not rejoice over wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.”³

Ar-Rahman. In the writings of Hazrat Inayat Khan, a Sufi master of the mystical tradition of Islam, we find: “The idea of the Sufi is that, however religious a person may be, without love that person is nothing. The same is true of one who has studied thousands of books; without love, that person has

learnt nothing. Love is not in a claim of loving; when love is born, one hears its voice louder than the voice of any person. Love needs no words; words are inadequate to express it. The best love can express itself is in what the Persians call "The Smiling Forehead."

Bhakti. Central to the Bhagavad Gita are the three themes: (1) *jñāna*, the light of knowledge to reach Brahman; (2) *bhakti*, devotional love, the bond of union between human beings and God, human beings with each other; and *karma*, the actions of life, the sacredness and beauty of work. On love, we hear Krishna saying:

The man who has good will for all, who is friendly and has compassion; who has no thoughts of 'I' or 'mine,' whose peace is the same in pleasures and sorrows, and who is forgiving, this Yogi of union, ever full of my joy, whose soul is in harmony and whose determination is strong, whose mind and inner vision are set on me – this man loves me, and he is dear to me.... The man whose love is the same for his enemies or his friends, whose soul is the same in honour or disgrace, who is beyond heat or cold or pleasure or pain, who is free from the chains of attachments, who is balanced in blame and in praise, whose soul is silent, who is happy with whatever he has, whose home is not in this world, and who has love – this man is dear to me.⁴

Metta. In the Buddhist tradition, compassion (*karuna*), sympathetic joy (*mudita*), equanimity (*upekkha*), and loving-kindness (*metta*) are the divine conditions of the mind. The *Metta Sutta* talks about loving-kindness:

May every creature abound in well-being and peace.
May every living being, weak or strong, the long and the small,
The short and the medium-sized, the mean and the great—
May every living being, seen or unseen, those dwelling far off,

Those near by, those already born, those waiting to be born—
May all attain inward peace.

Let no one deceive another.
Let no one despise another in any situation.
Let no one, from antipathy or hatred, wish evil to anyone at all.
Just as a mother, with her own life, protects her only son from hurt,
So within yourself foster a limitless concern for every living creature.
Display a heart of boundless love for all the world
In all its height and depth and broad extent,

Love unrestrained, without hate or enmity.
 Then as you stand or walk, sit or lie, until overcome by drowsiness,
 Devote your mind entirely to this,
 it is known as living here life divine.

Aloha. In the Hawaiian tradition, the word *aloha* captures our spirit of love. “A” stands for *akahai*, or kindness, expressed with tenderness. “L” stands for *lokahi*, or unity, expressed with harmony. “O” stands for *olu’olu*, or agreeableness, expressed with pleasantness. “H” stands for *ha’aha’a*, or humility, expressed with modesty. The final “A” stands for *ahonui*, or patience, expressed with perseverance.

Ai. The Chinese word for love is *ai*. When I was in Taiwan I learned that there were different meanings to love. One of them is *tung ai*, or “hurt love.” It was hard for me to understand that love could hurt. Gradually I came to realize that it is like the saying, “The mystic is not satisfied to be a lover, but a warrior. For a warrior defends all one loves.” Rev. Matthew Fox says that love that is felt deeply can be joyous like climbing mountains or painful as a mother who gives birth. This verse from Laozi reminds me of the qualities of this kind of “whole” love:

Yield and overcome;
 Bend and be straight;
 Empty and be full;
 Wear out and be new;
 Have little and gain;
 Have much and be confused.

Therefore wise men embrace the one
 And set an example to all.
 Not putting on a display,
 They shine forth.
 Not justifying themselves,
 They are distinguished.
 Not boasting,
 They receive recognition.
 Not bragging,
 They never falter.
 They do not quarrel,
 So no one quarrels with them.
 Therefore the ancients say, “Yield and overcome.”
 Is that an empty saying

Be really whole,
And all things will come to you.⁵

When we look at the world about us, how can we not be moved or affected by the increasing tensions between the world's people and, unfortunately, the world's religions? What can we do? "Peace begins with me." Love begins with you and me. All religions value the cultivation of loving-kindness. But how often does that translate beyond the membrane of ourselves, our own divine perfection or enlightenment? Love needs to be shared in order to build bridges and create more harmonious living.

There are many loving ways we can show our interest and foster bridge-building across the world's religions. We can take an interest in something beyond ourselves and what we already know. We can commit to learning something new. We don't need to wait for leaders to begin. We can begin with signing "I love you." For me, building bridges begins with:

1) *Education*. Study. Read. As a Dominican Sister I have an obligation to do so.

2) *Languages*. Learn another language, another way of greeting. I wasn't a very good student of Chinese, but now I realize how important it is. A greeting shows that we're interested in the other, unlike passing someone in silence. Examples of greetings are: "Asalaam Aleikum" "Aleikum Asalaam" (Islam); "Om namah Shivaya" (Hindu); "Shalom" (Jewish); "Namaste" (Hindu); "Buenos Dias" (Spanish); "Ohayo gozaimasu" (Japanese); "Ni Hao" (Chinese); and "Aloha" (Hawaiian).

3) *Perform Random Acts of Kindness*. Tzu Chi Foundation and other organizations give us excellent examples of performing good deeds without any desire for affirmation. When I entered the convent, I learned to do "secret good deeds." These might include ironing another sister's clothes, secretly polishing someone's shoes, or helping someone who might need something without knowing it. Maybe we can leave someone a happy note or let them know we are praying for them if they seem down.

4) *Music*. Music includes singing and playing. One means of attaining love for God is to chant the holy names of the Lord like in the Hare Krishna mantra: Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare, Hare. Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare. Or we can share our mantras: "Om tare tuttare ture svaha" or "Om mani padme hum." Or "Bismillah ir rahman ir rahim" (May the God of mercy and compassion be with us.).

5) *Art*. Create art. Art attracts people beyond boundaries. In my room in my altar space, I have a statue of Kuan Yin. I remember one time when I was riding my bike home from Cheng Da, the brakes gave way. As I was about to crash, I surprisingly yelled out "Kuan Yin!" Later I learned from Roshi Robert

Aitken that when Japan persecuted the Catholics long ago and they went underground, people took the statue of Kuan Yin with them and taught their children about Mary through her.

6) *Share Food*. Try something new. During the last Sakyadhita conference in Nepal, I caused a little bit of a ruckus as I passed out little M&M chocolate candies in bowls. Lekshe had to call everyone back to attention. It was something foreign. It was something good.

7) *Celebrate*. Join in the festivals of other religions. Take an interest. You don't need to accept their beliefs to respect their human expressions. In Hawai'i, I like to go to *matsuris* (festivals) and Bon dances, because I like dance, music, the lighting of the lanterns, the symbolism. And I join with them in my own prayer ways. I also take my students to Hindu love feasts where the chanting is engaging and the vegetarian food is enriching. Native American pow wows are also special gatherings to tap into the roots of the land.

8) *Smile*. After I came home from Taiwan, I used to cover my smile whenever I would laugh. An elderly nun asked me why I did that. She felt that a smile is a divine gift, a reflection of the contentment of the heart. Smile "a half-smile," as Thich Nhat Hanh says, like when we meditate.

In conclusion, I would like to leave you with the words of St. Teresa of Avila, who is known for reforming complacent nunneries and putting God/Love back in them: "*No esta la cosa en pensar mucho, sino en amar mucho*" ("What matters is not to think much, but to love much"). The following prayer has been adapted from one I found in *Tzu Chi Magazine*:

In my heart, I feel deep gratefulness
All my heart is filled with sincere prayer
From all corners of the world
Let us join our hearts and pray
For a world of harmony and peace.

In my heart, I feel deep gratefulness
May all the Buddhas, Krishna, Allah, Yehovah, Goddesses,
Great Spirit, Divine One, and God hear my prayer
All united with one heart
Let us end our hate and love
May there be no suffering year after year.

From my heart, I pray
May we pass on to all beings the light
Of true wisdom deep and bright
Of pure endless Great Love

That will guide us in our life.

From my heart, I pray
May we join our hands, our hearts as one
Spread the seeds of Great Love
Nurture wisdom evermore
Let us fill the world with hope

In my heart, I feel deep gratefulness
May all the Buddhas, Krishna, Allah, Yehovah, Goddesses,
Great Spirit, Divine One, and God know my prayer
All united with one heart
Let us end our hate and love
May there be no suffering year after year.

NOTES

1. The words and music of this song are by John Mohr and John Mays. It was recorded by the vocalist Sandi Patti.
2. Joel Beversluis, *A Sourcebook for the Community of Religions*, p. 128.
3. I Corinthians 13: 1-8.
4. Bhagavad Gita 12:13-14; 18-19.
5. *Tao Te Ching* 22.







Building Bridges: A Muslim Woman's Perspective

Hawwa Morales Soto

Listen to the reed flute, how it is complaining!
It is telling about separations,
Ever since I was severed from the reed field,
men and women have lamented in the presence of my shrill cries.
But I want a heart which is torn, torn from separation,
so that I may explain the pain of yearning.¹

To be Muslim is to recognize oneself, because to be a Muslim is not a matter of changing or converting to another religion, but of remembering our true nature, which we call "*fitr.*" Today Islam is associated with fanaticism, ignorance, and terrorism, but the same mass media that promotes this image unfortunately too easily forgets other facets of history. To understand what is happening in Middle Eastern, African, and Asian Muslim countries, it is necessary to understand the history of the last 60 years. Apart from the use of religion as a tool to gain power and manipulate, local and strictly personal interpretations are often confused with the tradition. Islamic nations have also suffered from colonialism and foreign political control, which has almost totally destroyed the roots of these nations. In addition, under the pretense of being "superior, modern, and democratic," other countries have tried to impose their way of life and culture as the correct one. Forgetting the particular circumstances and background of these countries, they have tried to eliminate any trace of Islamic thought. But one pattern does not necessarily fit everywhere.

There is also the erroneous idea that Islam is exclusively Arab. However, although Islam was revealed in an Arab country, the message is eternal and does not belong to any particular race. As Muhammad Iqbal, a great philosopher, poet, political and spiritual father of Pakistan, once said: “Islam is one thing, Muslims are another.” Religion is not created by ordinary people. Human beings create theology, but the truth is not always in our words. Nor should we always be considered representative examples of the religion to which we belong.

A bridge is built to join two borders, which, although different, both follow the course of the same river. But to built up a bridge, solid bases are needed; thus, it is necessary to know which the elements that are suitable for that task. Let me try to explain my own experience, in my short but somewhat intense life as Muslim. I hope these brief points can provide some new approaches towards other faiths. I must emphasize that I am speaking of my own experience, not in the name of Muslims as a whole. Although the essence of a tradition is always the same, each person’s own experience is unique.

First, there is a serious problem in countries belonging to the geographical area we call the “West,” of spiritual uprooting, which grows worse with the increasing secularization of people’s daily lives. People become fragmented and spirituality ceases to be a part of the unity of human-kind. When I studied Chinese medicine, I was able to see the serious repercussions this fragmentation has on mental and physical health.

People began looking for a substitute for that lost spirituality, opening the way for the proliferation of the so-called New Age movements. Pseudo-spiritual movements in several cases were simply copies of old traditions, adapted to the Western mentality, distorting their authentic message and only serving the personal interests of false masters or spiritual gurus. In the end, these movements offer a superficial and easy spirituality where aesthetic and “strange sensations” mask the void behind them.

One tradition that has suffered this illegitimate appropriation is Tasawwuf, also known as Sufism, which has often mistakenly been considered estranged from Islam. Tasawwuf, the mystical face of Islam, allows us to reach spiritual development not only through the Shari’a – behavioral precepts of divine origin that are to be interpreted with the times and applied to the circumstances of each generation – but also through the continuous work and daily examination of our own actions, service to others, and devotion to study and meditation.

Ignorance causes fear and misunderstandings, and people normally prefer to grasp at what is already known. But there is neither a unique pattern, nor a unique and true religion. Nobody can say, “My religion is the true one,” and use this as a pretext for any kind of action. All religions are different, but arrive at the same transcendental truth, without forgetting that each tradition has its

own special expression that enriches it. Ecumenism has to be well understood, lest it turn into the claim that “everything is the same,” which reduces the authentic scope of each tradition.

In my case, some people asked me with surprise and also with some reluctance how was it possible that a woman like me, living in a European country, independent, with a distinct culture, chose to be Muslim. I wonder if instead of questioning my choice, the question could be turned upside down as: if this person is that way, maybe then Islam is as different as I thought. For this reason, when we want to know other spiritual realities, we have to take into account that we shall be limited to a partial comprehension of our interlocutor’s tradition, because it is not the same to read or hear about one tradition than to live daily and sincerely that personal experience that cannot be understood really but through immersion in the same.

In the fourteenth century Lal Ded, a great woman of Kashmir, wrote:

Do not talk about different religions.
The One Reality is everywhere,
Not only in a Hindu or a Muslim.
It is nowhere. Realize it.
Your own conscience is the truth of God.

The different spiritual paths are like the color white. It is just one color, but it is formed of several different colors. In musical terms, just one note contains several harmonics.

The Arab word “*adab*” means culture as well as courtesy, then, when learning other ways of living spirituality, respectful and kind dialogue with others may help us to know better our own tradition too. Obviously, it may happen that some doubts or questions could also arise about your own way. There is no wrong in reconsidering if your tradition is really the one you truly believe in. This will lead us to examine ourselves and to correct possible errors that through continuous repetition in our life became a malpractice without noticing it. That will make us be sincere with ourselves and with others.

However, it is not wise to do this alone, we need a Master. In all teaching there is always someone who transmits and someone who receives. In Islam, in our work within Tasawwuf, this is crucial. Master and disciple; the first one as continuator of the Tradition or Knowledge contributing too with personal experience, and the disciple as continuator of the chain. I’d like to recall some old advice transmitted along a long chain of Masters and disciples, from Hazrat Ali, received by my Ustad Hayyi Jalil from Shaykh Barakat and which I gladly transmit to you: “My brother, you will not attain knowledge without six conditions which I’m going to list for you clearly: intelligence, real devotion,

effort, enough means to carry out your task, the company of a Master, and enough time to go ahead.”

The Master should be patient with the little or big imperfections of the person who wants to learn, and has to prepare him choosing the language to be used in order to make easier the steps from one stage to another. Excess of rigor when the disciple is not prepared could be an error. Furthermore, an excessive fervour creates bindings to the soul and one cannot flow harmoniously, giving pain and no satisfaction. In fact, one of the names given to a Master is *Jâdim*, the Server, because the task is to serve others and not to be served (*adab*) every time.

As for monastic life, it does not exist in Islam, because there is not a religious/lay division. Everybody can do the religious practices equally, as every act in life is a sacred act, an act of recognition that everywhere and in everything there is a sign of Allah. The work of each person, his or her evolution will depend on the opening level in which that person will be in each moment of their lives.

For us, the work within the community is very important, the believer tries to carry out the *Ibada*, the actions of praising Allah, with her/himself and with society. With our actions teaching, in medical care, in the support of the needy person, we are continuously renewing our Tradition, avoiding that it turns into following the letter without the spirit. Each one according to what has available at the moment, there is not one Islam in the strict sense, but there are many ways to express our compromise and our love, so many as believers delivered to the One. Only two things are required when entering into Islam: to accept that there is only one reality, that we call Allah and that Muhammad (peace be upon him) is its Prophet.

The religious retreat in Islam exists, but it is a retreat that you do within yourself, searching to know and comprehend better your own reality. We say “Who knows oneself, knows his Lord,” this is the most important *Yihad*, the personal effort that each one does to polish the heart of impurities.

Also the reading of our own scriptures is fundamental. In Islam it is necessary to have a knowledge, at least basic, of the Arab language. The Qur’an was revealed in Arabic, which was the language that was better fitted to the message, only the knowledge of this language can give us the whole richness of connotations that the words contain, their vibration, rhythm, and strength are the keys to understand it, because the Qur’an is not a book to be read or to be consulted, but is a message to be lived. A translation is merely a translation, not the Qur’an. And no one can say that her/his interpretation of it, is the correct one, as it can be interpreted on different levels, depending on the intellectual and spiritual evolution of the person. Obviously, this is not an open door to or authorization of reprehensible actions.

Life circumstances made me share my path mainly with women who are

very active and devoted to the defence of Muslim women's rights, as it is clearly indicated in the Qur'an. These are rights that have been denied and what is more serious, hidden to many women, unfortunately, for a long time, contrary to what happened in actual fact during the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him). As I said, it is important to read the scriptures on your own.

However, for those who lack knowledge of Arabic, a good translation of course could be a first approach. For example, I'd like to mention the first translations to Chinese of Arab texts about Islam in the seventeenth century, using a Confucian vocabulary background with very fruitful results. This work was carried out by Wang Tai-yü and Liu Chih, and has been compiled and translated into English by the specialist Sachiko Murata in her book "Gleams of Sufi Light." But, I repeat, do not forget that even a good translation it is still only a translation.

Also, I would like to say that, from my experience as volunteer in the creation of the first congress of Muslim women in Spain and other events conducted by women, I have had the pleasure to see how beautiful it can be to see ourselves united with the same ideals, although the means and circumstances were not at all the most favourable. Women have a great work ahead, a great and beautiful work. Nothing really should impede us to be also Masters and chains of transmission to help our sisters and brothers. The great Andalusian philosopher Ibn al 'Arabi said: Humanity, which is the essential attribute of human beings, is one for everybody; masculinity or femininity are accidental, with their own essential characteristics". Men should try to go into our inner space and know it, but also we have to kindly invite them to do so And if they really, heartily, accept the invitation, that could be also a good opportunity to open another interesting dialogue.

One alternative to share that inner space and to have a common language while dialoguing with others could be through prayer and music, everybody doing the same travel to the interior. In Tasawwuf the travel is important, to travel in the physical and spiritual sense. Travel is the source of knowledge, in the end we are all travellers in this world.

Prayer in Islam and the reading of the Qur'an are uttered following a rhythm, giving special attention to each one of the sounds we emit, even, I'd say, in the sound of the silence in those moments we pray speechless, only accompanied by the music of the respiration and your heart. Each moment has to be lived not only with a sensorial sensation but also a physical one. As a student of Shakuhachi, a Japanese flute, there is a related expression that especially touched me: *ichi on jobutsu*. "One sound can be made to reach the Buddha, one unique sound can awaken you." In fact, Sufi meetings are called Sama'a, "Listening." Quoting once again that great Master of Islam, Jalal ud-Din Rumi: "We are the harp and You (Al-lah) are who play our strings."

Last, please remember that a bridge needs a strong and firm basis. Each of us, each of you, are a valuable and unique element of this ground. Be clear in your convictions and always consider the consequences of your acts and comments. This is the best way to continue working.

NOTES

1. These verses are the beginning of *The Song of the Reed*, one of the most beautiful poems of mystical love of the great Jalal ud-Din Rumi. It tells us about the natural remembrance of our origins.







Bridging the Gap with Interreligious Dialogue

Karuna Dharma

Interreligious dialogue is rather new. It began only about 100 years ago in the United States, when the World Parliament of Religions met in Chicago in 1893. This was the first time that the United States was publicly exposed to religions other than Christianity and Judaism. Actually, 50 years earlier Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry Davis Thoreau were reading about Indian religions, particularly Hinduism and Buddhism, and led a group of writers called the Transcendentalists in examining alternative worlds of reality. But only a few members of the intelligentsia read their work.

In 1893, when the World Parliament of Religions was held in Chicago, many more Americans became exposed to other worldviews. The conference did not end as its organizers hoped – with the Asians recognizing the superiority of Christianity. In fact, the opposite was the case. Famous Buddhist monks came from Thailand and a group of scholars from Japan. These included the young D.T. Suzuki, the great Zen scholar, who later introduced many Americans to Zen, and the great Anagarika Dharmapala from Sri Lanka, who, in particular, made a great hit, especially among the ladies. He was very articulate and handsome. A short time later, the first American took refuge, thus beginning the movement of Americans toward Buddhism. I do not believe that there were any women who presented papers at that conference, although many women did attend.

About the time of the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago, Sri Lanka had become primarily Christian, due to 450 years of colonial rule. Colonel Henry Steele Olcott, an American civil war hero, had been traveling through India and Sri Lanka with Madame Blavatsky, when he converted to

Buddhism in public. This act so emboldened the Sinhalese that they threw off their rice-bowl Christianity and reconstructed Buddhism. During this period of Buddhist history, Colonel Olcott wrote the first Buddhist catechism, including the twelve principles common to all Buddhists. He is also credited with designing the Buddhist flag that we use today. He is so important to Sinhalese Buddhists that his birthday is a national holiday in Sri Lanka.

The main topic of this paper is contemporary interreligious dialogue in the United States, particularly Los Angeles, as seen from my perspective. Buddhist participation in interreligious dialogue began in 1980 with the establishment of the Buddhist Saṅgha Council of Los Angeles, which is comprised of *bhikkhus*, *bhikkhunīs*, *śrāmaṇeras*, *śrāmaṇerikās*, and ministers. Every member has an equal vote. About one-fifth of the Saṅgha Council members are women.

The Saṅgha Council began when Ven. Dr. Havanpola Ratanasara called all Saṅgha members in Los Angeles together to find a solution to a serious problem that was occurring in the Sinhalese community. From this initial meeting, a decision was made to form the Saṅgha Council. I wrote the organization's constitution, registered it in California, and established its tax-exempt status. I was immediately elected secretary, not because of my expertise in non-profit legal matters, but because of my skill as a native English speaker and my ability to take good notes. In California, the secretarial position is second only to the presidency in importance. As a result, Dr. Ratanasara and I met frequently to plan and carry out the Council's programs. In the course of these frequent meetings, an unusual friendship flourished. Dr. Ratanasara was Sri Lankan, a male of the Theravāda tradition and twenty years older than I was. I was American born, a woman, a Mahāyāna *bhikkhunī*, and considerably younger.

At the same time, the College of Buddhist Studies was established under the auspices of the Saṅgha Council and I was made secretary of it, also. Dr. Ratanasara and I began team teaching a year-long course called Buddhist History and Development, which traced the history of the tradition from pre-Buddhist India to the present day, showing how all the various Buddhist traditions developed and explaining their relationship to each other. The last several weeks of the course focused on interreligious dialogue and concerns. It soon became the college's most popular course.

In Los Angeles, there are large populations of many different ethnic communities. In 1970, three very farsighted individuals – Monsignor Royal Vadakin of the ecumenical Office of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese, Rabbi Alfred Wolf of the board of Rabbis, and Dr. George Cole, a Protestant minister – founded the Interreligious Council of Southern California. They soon discovered, however, that they had an ecumenical group of Christians and Jews, rather than an interreligious council. So they began to systematically seek out faith groups other than the Abrahamic religions. First they invited the

Muslims to join, then the Sikhs, Christian Orthodox, Hindus, Buddhists, and finally the Mormons.

In 1982, Monsignor Vadakin spoke to Dr. Ratanasara, the eldest Theravādin *bhikṣu* in Los Angeles, whom he used to see occasionally in the local bank, and invited him to join the Council. Dr. Ratanasara called me and asked my opinion about this invitation. By that time Bhante Ratanasara and I had become good friends. We discussed the idea, agreed to join, and sought out two other friends to join with us. We chose Ven. Setthakic Samahito from Wat Thai and Ven. Yin Hai, a Chinese elder. The five of us became the Buddhist representatives on the Interreligious Council. The IRC consists of four representatives from each faith community: the Catholic Archdiocese, the Board of Rabbis, the Orthodox Christian community, the Ecumenical Council, Sikhs, Hindus, Buddhists, and the Mormons.

The IRC meets monthly, sharing important ideas about their faith traditions. Occasionally the groups makes statements to the press about important subjects such as access to health care, crime, religious intolerance, and the like. Before the IRC issues any statement, every member of the group must agree upon the specific terminology.

Late in 1985, Monsignor Vadakin called me and asked if I would be the Buddhist representative on a small committee to plan the interreligious aspect of Pope John Paul II's visit to Los Angeles in 1987. I agreed and helped the Archdiocese determine how they would celebrate the twentieth anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, an important encyclical of Pope John XXIII. We agreed to hold a discussion between the Pope and the representatives of the four non-Christian traditions that *Nostra Aetate* addressed.

The *Nostra Aetate* was the document that opened Catholic attitudes toward other religions and removed statements indicating that these religions were false or misleading. In this document, Pope John XXIII stated that the Church recognized its roots as coming from Judaism, stressed its brotherhood with Islam, admitted its kinship with Hindu concepts of God, and praised Buddhism for its concepts of wisdom and compassion. The document ended by stating that the Church found much to be admired in these religions and encouraged all Catholics to enter into dialogue with members of other faiths.

At the meeting, the Holy Father sat in exactly the same type of chair and on the same level as the Jew, the Muslim, the Hindu, and the Buddhist – a first for any Pope. The Saṅgha Council decided that Dr. Ratanasara should be the spokesman for the Buddhists and I should present His Holiness with gifts from the Buddhist community. There were 150 representatives from each of the four communities at the meeting that took place. The Pope was ushered onto the stage hand-in-hand with Bishop Saito, a Jodo Shinshu Buddhist leader. The Bishop introduced the Pope and ended by saying, “Each of us has a

mother, but my mother is best.”

The four men each addressed the Pope and he responded to their concerns. After the program, the drama continued backstage, where only the Pope, two cardinals from Rome, Monsignor Vadakin, a Catholic monk, numerous Secret Service men, and four representatives of the IRC were standing. After we presented our gifts and received gifts in exchange, we were waiting for the Pope’s limousine to drive in. At that time the Hindu representative started to make small talk with the Pope.

At this point, I thought perhaps I should carry out the task I have been given. There had already been an assassination attempt on the Pope’s life, so security was very tight. Those of us who were to meet directly with the Pope were kept in a separate room, but I stood there at the door, waving to all the Buddhists as they came in. A number of them came to me and handed me rosaries, asking me to get the Pope to bless them. I thought there was no way I could ask that of him, so I slipped them into my sleeve. Later, as I stood face-to-face with him, I said, “Holy Father, as you know, many of our Vietnamese and Sri Lankan Buddhist families have Catholics in them as well. Some of these people wanted me to ask you to bless their rosaries. He said, “Give them to me.” Just as I reached into the sleeve of my ceremonial yellow robe to pull out the rosaries, six Secret Service men reached into their belts to pull out their guns. They looked at Monsignor Vadakin, who motioned them to put their guns away. The Pope took the rosaries, blessed them, and returned them to me, at which point, I again secreted them in my sleeve. I did not know about the Secret Service men’s reactions until later, when Monsignor Vadakin told me the story. I believe that John Paul and I were looking into each other’s eyes so intently that we were the only ones who were unaware of what was happening.

In 1988 Buddhist-Catholic dialogue was initiated in Los Angeles. An ongoing group meets every six weeks, with the same original eight Buddhist and eight Catholic representatives. After Dr. Ratanasara’s death in 2000, I became the Buddhist co-chair of the group. Mike Kerze, a scholar, is the Catholic co-chair. We have already co-authored a booklet about our first year of dialogue, called *Beginning Journey*. Members of the group have been meeting consistently for 13 years now.

The importance of women’s participation in interreligious concerns cannot be overemphasized. From the very beginning, three of the eight Buddhist members of the dialogue were women, but the Catholics had only one woman. Today, on each side, half of the members are women. Once a woman is recognized as a Buddhist leader, many opportunities open up. Last month I spoke at a gathering at a Jewish temple on the topic, “What We Believe: From Birth to Bereavement.” I am frequently asked to participate in various interreligious activities. I am currently on the local planning committee for the

next conference of the Buddhist-Christian Studies Conference to be held in 2005 at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles.

As Buddhist women, we must make ourselves known through our good works. If we make ourselves indispensable, we will be invited to serve on more committees than it is possible to serve on. I am fortunate, because I have always had the support of the Bhikṣu Saṅgha. Whenever a conservative Theravādin monk visited, Venerable Ratanasara would introduce me, saying, “This entire center belongs to her.” Then he would send them to Hsi Lai Temple, saying, “Go visit this Chinese temple. It cost \$26 million to build and all of the work was done by *bhikṣuṇīs*, not *bhikṣus*. The *bhikṣuṇīs* raised the money and oversaw the building and landscaping.”

In fact, my support among the *bhikṣus* is so strong that, in 1994, I held my first grand ordination ceremony. Responsibility for the traditional ceremony was shared equally, with Dr Ratanasara serving as the eldest *bhikṣus* and myself serving as the eldest *bhikṣuṇī*, in the role of *upādhyāyika*. There were six precept masters, male and female, and 30 witnessing masters. At the ceremony, we ordained seven women from the Tibetan tradition, two Vietnamese *bhikṣuṇīs*, one Theravādin Vietnamese *bhikṣuṇī*, one Vietnamese *śrāmaṇerikā*, two American Dharma teachers, two Vietnamese *śrāmaṇeras*, four *anagārikās*, and eight *upāsakas*.

In my letter inviting the Saṅgha members in L.A. to participate as ordination masters or witnesses, I explained that we would hold the traditional ceremony in English and place female masters on the same level as males. I received no answers of disagreement to what I was doing. Everyone responded either with, “Yes, I will attend” or “Yes, I approve of what you are doing, although I cannot attend.”

At this ordination, I had the full cooperation and participation of Theravādin *bhikṣus* of both Sri Lanka and Thailand. They were following Dr. Ratanasara’s lead, for which I thank him. In 1997, we held our second grand ordination. At that three-hour ceremony, representatives from the Buddhist-Christian Dialogue group and the IRC also attended.

There is nothing that a woman cannot do, especially if she has the approval of the Bhikṣu and Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha. To achieve that end, you must use every *upāya* (skillful means) that you can think of. Make yourself known and be persistent in your efforts. They do pay off.





Bridging the World Religions from Within: On Being a Buddhist Christian Woman

Maria Reis Habito

In my paper I will describe steps in my path from a traditional Roman Catholic background to continuing embodiment of both the Buddhist and Christian traditions. Even though these steps are described on the basis of personal experience, they may serve to shed light on the dynamics of becoming existentially engaged, involved in, and committed to more than just one religious tradition.

I was raised in a traditional but liberal Catholic family. My family was traditional in the sense that we went to church on every Sunday and on all of the feast days, and prayed before meals and going to bed, and liberal in the sense that there was room to criticize those people or happenings in the church that we did not agree with. When I left for my studies in Taiwan after graduating from high school, I had inherited from my grandmother and mother a firm trust in God's existence and guidance.

It was 1978 in Keelung, Taiwan, at the age of 18, that my first encounter with Buddhism took place. One day Father Joseph Wang, who is now auxiliary bishop, invited my mother and me to visit a Buddhist nun who had made the vow to stay in one room for 15 years and to only eat what people brought to support her during that time. She had just come out of retreat and was open to receiving visitors. On the way to the monastery, my mother and I talked about how strange this nun must be to engage in such a practice. When we arrived, the nun greeted us with a big smile, asking: "Are you Christians?" When we

answered “yes,” she smiled even more and said, “Christian or Buddhist, it does not make the slightest difference. We are all brothers and sisters.” This openness of hers impressed me very much and made me so strongly aware of my own prejudices and ignorance that I decided to take up the study of Buddhism. Often the initial encounter with another religion does just this: it helps us realize our own prejudices and ignorance, and instills in us the wish to learn more about the unfamiliar religion and the people who practice it. This is the first step towards building a foundation for building bridges between the world religions.

My next encounter with Buddhism took place in Ilan, where I met Master Hsin Tao for the first time in 1980. A friend took me to see him there in his small hermitage. Again, I was received with great friendliness. But when Master Hsin Tao told me that I had come because there existed a very deep karmic link between us, I felt rather confused. As a Christian, I was not familiar with the concept of karma. What connection could exist between a young German woman like me and a Chinese Buddhist monk? When Master Hsin Tao invited me to come and visit him again, I felt rather hesitant at first. But after some time I mustered all my courage to see him again because, somewhere deep inside, I felt that this encounter with him was existentially important. I still was not used to thinking in terms of karma, but I believed that I had come because of God’s guidance and because God wanted to give me the opportunity to learn from this exceptional Buddhist teacher. I think that this sort of trust or conviction, which is existentially important for us to get to know or learn from another religion, is the next step towards building a bridge between religions. Our dialogue is more fruitful if we bring God, Allah, or Buddha to the encounter in our heart, rather than merely discussing the notion of God, Buddha, or Allah in a theoretical or dogmatic manner.

Master Hsin Tao challenged many of the beliefs that I held. For example, he challenged the beliefs that I was created by God and therefore an individual different from others, that there is a big difference between God and human beings, that it is never possible for a human being other than Jesus Christ to be God, that human beings only have one existence in this world and then go to either paradise or hell, and that as a Christian and a German, I could not possibly become the disciple of a Buddhist master.

One day, I saw Master Hsin Tao offering food and lightening incense in front of a white Buddhist figure that looked almost like a Madonna, and I asked him: “Master, what are you doing? Who is that figure? I thought that, in Zen Buddhism, you do not worship idols?” He replied, “This is not an idol. This is you. This is your true nature – pure compassion and wisdom.”

His answer utterly confused me at first and then launched me on a path of self-examination. “This is you.” What in the world did he mean? What did he

see or understand about me that I did not? Here again, I suggest that we need to be engaged in the encounter with another religion in a way that is open to reexamining long-held beliefs about who we are and what the self is. That is another building stone for the bridge between religions.

My discussions with the Master about God, the self, and the nature of reality also made me aware of how little I really knew about my own religion and how difficult it was for me to explain the little I knew coherently. When I returned to the University of Munich in Fall 1981, I decided to enroll in Asian Studies and Philosophy to learn more about the Western notions of God and reality, and about the Christian theological tradition. I think that the renewed and deepened interest in one's own tradition almost always results from an engagement with another religion. The point of interreligious dialogue is never to give up everything we believe and fully adopt another religion, or to claim that basically there is not the slightest difference between the two, but instead to really understand where we ourselves are coming from and where the person of the other religious belief is coming from. The renewed and deepened study of one's own tradition in order to be better able to explain it to others is another building stone to bridge religions.

I visited Master Hsin Tao again in 1983, when he had moved to Lingjiushan and was meditating in a cave. "This time you have come to become my disciple," he told me as a greeting. This puzzled me again. How could I, as a Christian, possibly formally become the disciple of a Buddhist master? But, reading my mind, the Master addressed my doubts by adding, "I know that you believe in God. This step – becoming my disciple – will not put you into any conflict with your belief in God. But it will help you to always keep a connection to the Buddhist Dharma, even if you never ever come back to see me again." This simple explanation of his helped me to overcome my inner resistance and to let go of the notion that being Catholic and taking Buddhist vows is contradictory and mutually exclusive. While I was saying the triple refuge during the ceremony, I was overcome by such deep joy and gratitude that I knew with certainty that I was meant to do just this and knew that taking Buddhist vows was the right thing to do. But here I want to emphasize that this was my own, very personal journey, or karma, if you so will, that led me to this step. By no means do I want to suggest that every Buddhist person engaged in interreligious dialogue should become baptized or take steps to be formally integrated into any of the other religions. But, for me, this step – taking Buddhist vows – was a very joyful experience of non-duality that has had a deep and lasting impact on my life.

The Master advised that I had to really sit down and meditate if I wanted to understand what Buddhist practice was all about, and that even writing a dissertation about a Buddhist text would not bring me the understanding

that comes from meditation. Following this advice, I started sitting on my own and then joined a week-long Zen retreat at a Franciscan monastery. The retreat was led by Father Enomiya Lassalle, a Jesuit priest who had studied Zen meditation in Japan and was a pioneer in first introducing this practice to Christians. I continued my Zen practice with him for four years, from 1983-87, and then continued to practice under the guidance of his teacher, Yamada Koun Roshi, in Japan. The guidance of these two extraordinary teachers helped me to come to greater intimacy with God, an experience of God not as a being outside and far away, but as a living reality right within myself. Zen meditation is a purifying process that helps us let go of dualistic concepts and notions, thereby gradually opens us up to the experience of wisdom and compassion, or, in Christian terms, the love of God.

It was during a retreat in 1987 that I had the first powerful glimpse into the reality that Christians call the love of God. In one grace-filled moment of pure awareness, I experienced God's pure love embracing me, the other retreatants, and the whole universe. This experience left me shedding tears of repentance about my former blindness and tears of infinite gratitude at the same time. It was later confirmed by Yamada Roshi as an initial *satori*, or awakening experience.

No matter what religion we adhere to, the challenge is always to integrate the extraordinary moments of insight, grace, and awareness into our ordinary lives, to make them transform our self-centeredness into genuine care and concern for others. As the mother of two young sons, as a teacher, and now as director of international programs of the Museum of World Religions, I try to practice this in my own life. My personal foundation in all of this is the experience of non-duality and love that I was blessed with through Zen meditation, but even this experience needs to be continually purified. Now that my children are more independent and I have a little more time, I continue my Zen practice and koan study, even though my progress is slow. But it seems that we are always helped on our path to grow in wisdom and compassion. In my case, the life-threatening illness of a friend and my brother's depression have transformed me into a petitionary mode of being. Now my Catholic Buddhist practices completely intermingle. I say intercessory prayers like the Hail Mary or Kyrie, together with the Great Compassion Mantra, in the desire to alleviate their suffering and that of all others. A new connection to the Tibetan practice of *tonglen* (taking and sending) has recently emerged in this context, which is one further step in my own personal bridging of world religions.

In conclusion, let me repeat the steps and stones in the building of bridges between religions that I have found in my own personal journey, which I believe are important for any bridge we want to build, not only in building bridges between religions:

1. The foundation from which to start: in my case, the trust that God is guiding me in the exploration of new territory, both outside of and within myself;
2. The honesty to recognize the limitations of our prejudices and ignorance vis-a vis others, and the sincere endeavor to overcome both;
3. The openness to examine oneself and to challenge one's basic assumptions about self, the other, and all of reality;
4. The renewed study of one own tradition in order to be better able to understand and explain it to others;
5. The renewed commitment to spiritual practice, to growing in insight, love and compassion;
6. The integration of insight into daily life; and connected with that,
7. Finding concrete ways to practice compassion, for example, doing social work, peace work, hospice work, or practicing *tonglen*.

Finally, we will find that building bridges within ourselves naturally leads to building bridges to all other human beings. We will begin to view each other no longer as strangers, but as beloved friends and parts of ourself.





Bridging the Buddhist Traditions





Comparing the First Buddhist Women in Early Chinese and Ancient Indian Buddhism

Sukdham Sunim (Inyoung Chung)

To examine the lives of the first Buddhist women in early Chinese Buddhism and the first Buddhist women in ancient Indian Buddhism, I have conducted a comparative study of nuns in the two Buddhist texts: the *Biqiuni zhuan* (*Biographies of Nuns*) in Chinese and the *Therīgāthā* (*Verses of Elder Nuns*) in Pāli. I have organized this comparative study into two parts. In the first part of the paper, I compare the social classes of women before joining the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha. In the second part, I compare the motivations and other circumstances which led women to monastic life. By closely comparing the women in the *Biqiuni zhuan* and the *Therīgāthā* women in the two texts can roughly be grouped into the social categories to which they belonged before they joined the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha.

Table 1 reveals the remarkable differences between the backgrounds of the women who renounced the world in the *Biqiuni zhuan* and the *Therīgāthā*. Classification of the women in the two texts shows that a large number of unmarried women and children joined the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha in the *Biqiuni zhuan*. By contrast, in the *Therīgāthā*, the women who renounced worldly life belonged to a wide variety of social ranks, ranging from royalty to slaves.

As Table 1 shows, in the *Biqiuni zhuan*, the largest number of women who joined the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha were unmarried. Of a total of 65 women mentioned in this text, 25 refused to marry and instead became nuns. The ages of the unmarried women range from 13 to 29. In the category of unmarried

women in the *Biqiuni zhuan*, there is evidence of a struggle between parents and their daughters when the daughters refused to marry and wished to become nuns instead. Two biographies of the *Biqiuni zhuan* state that these two girls threatened to commit suicide as a way of obtaining permission from their parents to enter monastic life. Many unmarried women in the *Biqiuni zhuan* waited until they reached their 20s to get their parents' permission to enter the monastery.

Whether unmarried women waited patiently for their parents' permission to enter monastic life or obtained permission by threatening suicide, some biographies of the *Biqiuni zhuan* suggest that women had to overcome great obstacles and struggles with their parents to follow their spiritual path. Perhaps the most difficult barrier for women in early Chinese Buddhism was resolving the conflict between Buddhist and Confucian values. Many of the biographies in the *Biqiuni zhuan* show that women's struggle for spiritual freedom has been ongoing. Regardless of the obstacles, many women successfully broke through these social barriers.

The second category of entrants to the monastery in the *Biqiuni zhuan* were 16 children. Most of the biographies in this category provide no information about the backgrounds of the children. In five cases, however, we learn that the girls obtained permission from their parents to enter the monastery, even though they were quite young.

In several cases, the *Biqiuni zhuan* provides no clear information about the backgrounds and activities of the women before they became nuns, so it is difficult to determine which categories are appropriate for them. However, three biographies provide clues that allow us to speculate about their secular lives. Zhu Daoxin's biography mentions the time of her probationary period (*śikṣamāṇā*) and her full ordination as a *bhikṣuṇī* at the age of 20. We can guess that she became a nun as an unmarried woman. Two biographies inform us that both Zhi Miaoyin and Daoqiong had attained a high level of literacy through their childhood education. Both of them are described as highly learned nuns in both Confucian classics and Buddhist scriptures. Because of the information we have about the length of their education in childhood, we probably can assume that these two women also entered monastic life as unmarried women.

There are nine additional biographies with no clear information about the women's secular backgrounds that may be included in the categories of unmarried women or children. This assumption is based on the fact that the biographies identify these nuns by their natal surnames and families. There is no further identification or association with any male, such as a husband. Thus, we can assume that most of the women whose backgrounds are unclear became *bhikṣuṇīs* as unmarried women.

In the *Therīgāthā* the women who renounced worldly life came from a variety of social classes. The majority of the women mentioned in the *Therīgāthā* also joined the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha before they married. The second large number of women were widows, including Mahāprajāpatī Gotamī and Siddhartha's harem. All of the women who are described as widows in the *Therīgāthā* belonged to "the five hundred." These "five hundred" women are said to belong to two clans, the Sākya and the Koliya. Yet we cannot be certain that all of the five hundred women were widows. Some of them might have been nurses, dancers, musicians, or slaves at King Suddodana's court. Of course, the five hundred women who reportedly joined the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha with Mahāprajāpatī Gotamī cannot be included into our discussion, since it is impossible to determine how many of these women achieved *arahantship* or how many verses in the *Therīgāthā* can be ascribed to the enlightened women of the five hundred.

The third large category of women in the *Therīgāthā* joined the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha after having been wives. Children, old women, and homeless women also entered monastic life. Some of the children in the *Therīgāthā* followed their parents' path in becoming nuns.

Additional categories of women in the *Therīgāthā* are those described as mothers, queens, princesses, consorts, Jain nuns, courtesans, prostitutes, and slaves. These diverse categories of women in the *Therīgāthā* are not found in the *Biqiuni zhuan*. In the *Therīgāthā*, young and old women, widows, wives, fiancées, mothers, and daughters, wealthy and poor women, privileged women and prostitutes, all followed the Buddhist path, achieved the highest goal of liberation, and sang verses about their religious experiences. The wide variety of women who joined the Bhikṣu and Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha in the *Therīgāthā* suggests that not only did women from various walks of life seek admission to the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha, but also that the Buddha's teachings reached women in all classes of society.

A comparative analysis of the social backgrounds of the women in the two texts indicate a distinctive difference, but a common theme is that women in both texts generally entered monastic life of their own will. As a way of further comparing the women of the two texts, I have grouped the women's reasons for joining the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha according to either their self-motivation or other situations that propelled them to seek the monastic life.

Table 2 reveals that the majority of the women in the *Biqiuni zhuan* and the *Therīgāthā* joined the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha of their own free will. In the *Biqiuni zhuan*, 41 out of 65 joined the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha voluntarily. In these biographies, women demonstrate a strong religious aspiration and determination to pursue their spiritual freedom. Interestingly, many of the nuns whose biographies are included in the *Biqiuni zhuan* were able to read

and write; the text indicates an especially high rate of literacy among the women before they joined the monastic order. Yet, based on the life stories of the selected remarkable nuns in the *Biqiuni zhuan*, it would be rash to say that women who entered monastic life in early Chinese Buddhist history generally had a literary education. Still, it is reasonable to assume that women with high standards of literacy would have had better a opportunity to learn the Buddha's teachings and to pursue the religious path.

Like the women in the *Biqiuni zhuan*, the majority of women in the *Therīgāthā* also became nuns of their own free will. The *Therīgāthā* shows that women of all walks of life and various castes among those who had access to the teachings of the Buddha chose the spiritual path. Out of 73 women in the *Therīgāthā*, 71 became nuns voluntarily. By contrast, in the *Biqiuni zhuan* there is no woman who joined the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha against her will. The circumstances of all the women in the *Therīgāthā* are clearly indicated in commentaries, whether they became nuns of their own wishes or by other circumstances. By contrast, in the *Biqiuni zhuan* there is a category of women for whom we have no clear information regarding the circumstances that led them to monastic life. Even though 22 biographies in the *Biqiuni zhuan* do not clearly explain whether the women joined monastic life of their own free will or due to other circumstances, the category of children entering the monastery includes eight biographies and these can be included in the category of self-initiated monastic life. As discussed earlier, those who entered the monastery as children were required to complete a period of probation and education under the guidance of the precepts, such as the ten precepts of a *śrāmaṇerikā* or the six precepts of a *śikṣamāṇā*.

When we consider that the practice of training as a female probationer and the proper age for full ordination as a *bhikṣuṇī* had been already established as 20 prior to the eight biographies of the nuns, we can assume that children who resided at the monastery from their childhood became nuns through their own wishes, since they had to wait until the proper age of 20 to be fully ordained. However, for 13 women in the *Biqiuni zhuan*, it is unclear whether they joined the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha by their own or through other situations. In one case the family origin is unknown. In 12 biographies, the compiler only tells us the life stories of the nuns without mentioning the backgrounds of their secular lives. By comparing the wishes or other circumstances that led the women to leave worldly life in the two texts, it is evident that almost all of the women in both traditions voluntarily joined the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha, even though in both social contexts women were not encouraged to follow the spiritual path. Women with high spiritual aspirations found liberty to follow their spiritual path and achieve their religious goals of liberation and peace.

In conclusion, a comparison of women in the two texts shows that there are both differences and similarities. In the *Biqiuni zhuan*, the majority of women joined the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha as unmarried women or children, whereas in the *Therīgāthā* women with different social backgrounds joined the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha. Whereas in the *Biqiuni zhuan*, many women with upper-class urban backgrounds and secular literacy education sought monastic life as unmarried women or children, in the *Therīgāthā* women from a range of backgrounds and classes of society from high to low, without distinction, mingled in the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha.

Almost all of the women in both texts renounced the world by their own free will. However, the most striking difference between the *Therīgāthā* and the *Biqiuni zhuan* is a group of women who achieved spiritual awakening before joining the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha. Out of 73 women in the *Therīgāthā*, 12 became nuns after they attained a certain level of spiritual awakening. Sumedhā, for example, entered the state of the first *jhāna* (absorption) before joining the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha. Six women are described as having become *sotāpanna* (stream-winner) before they were ordained. Two women became nuns after attaining *anāgāmī* (non-returner). Three joined the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha after they became *arahant* (liberated beings), the final stage of sainthood that can be reached as a human being in early Buddhism. The *Biqiuni zhuan* contains only the biographies of remarkable nuns, while the *Therīgāthā* includes only the enlightened verses of *arahant* nuns. Thus, we should not conclude that the women in the two texts represent a comprehensive picture of the first Buddhist women in the two Buddhist traditions.

TABLE NO. 1 Begins on next page

TABLE NO. 1

	<i>Biqiuni zhuān</i> ¹	<i>Therīgāthā</i> ²
Unmarried women	I. 2, I. 3, I. 6, I. 8, I. 11, II. 5, II. 6, II. 8, II. 11, II. 14, II. 20-21, III. 4, III. 6, III. 12, IV. 1, IV. 3-5, IV. 7-8, IV. 10, IV. 12-14	Muttā (2), ³ Punṇā (3), Nandā(19-20), ⁴ Jentī (21-22), Dantikā (48-50), Sukkhā(54-56), Selā(57-59), Somā (60-62), Sīhā (77-81), Sakulā(97-101), Anopamā (151-156), Guttā(163-168), Cālā (182-188), Upacālā(189-195), Sisūpacālā (196-203), Uppalavannā (224-235), Rohinī (271-290), Sudhā (338-365), Subhā, Jīvakambavaniā (366-399), Sumedhā (448-522).
Children	II. 9-10, II. 12-13, II. 18, II. 22-23, III. 1-3, III. 7, III. 12, III. 15, IV. 2, IV. 9, IV. 11	Nandā (82-86), Sundarī (312-337)
Widows	I. 1, I. 13, III. 13	Tissā (4), Another Tissā (5), Dhīrā (6). Another Dhīrā (7), Mittā(8), Bhadrā (9), Upasamā(10), Visākhā (13), Sumana (14), Uttara(15), Sanghā (18), Mittā (31 -32), An unknown <i>bhikkhunī</i> (67-71), Mahāprajāpatī Gotamī (152-162)
Wives	I. 4, I. 5	An unknown <i>bhikkhunī</i> (1) Muttā (11), Dhammadinnā (12), An unknown <i>bhikkhunī</i> (23-24), Bhaddā Kāpilānī (63-66), Sujātā (145-150), Vaddha's mother (204-212), Cāpā (299-311), Isidāsī

TABLE NO. 1 (continued)

Homeless Women	II.1	Patācārā (112-116), Candā (122-126)
Old Women	II.2	Sumanā (16), Dhammā (17), Sonā (102-106)
Mothers with children's death	None	Ubbirī (51-53), Pabcasatā Patācārā (127-132), Vāsithī (133-138), Kisāgotamī (213-223)
Queens	None	Ubbirī (51-53), Mahāprajāpatī Gotamī (157-162)
Princess	None	Sumanā(16), Sela (57-59) Sumedhā (448-522)
Consorts	None	Khemā (139-144)
Jain nuns	None	Nanduttarā (107-111)
Courtesans	None	Abhayamātā (33-34), Ambapālī (252-270)
Prostitutes	None	Addhakāsī (25-26), Vimalā (72-76)
Slaves	None	Punnikā (236-251)
Women with Unclear Backgrounds	I. 7, I. 9-10, I. 12, II. 1, II. 3-4, II. 7, II. 15, II. 17, II. 19, III. 5, III. 8-10, III. 14, IV. 6	Cittā (27-28), Mettikā (29-30), Abhayattherī (35-36), Sāmā (37-38), Another Sāmā (39-41), Uttamā (42-44), Another Uttamā (45-47), Mittakālī (92-96), Thirty <i>bhikkhunīs</i> under Patācārā (117-121), Pabcasatā Patācārā (127-132), Vijayā(169-174), Uttarā (175-181)

TABLE NO. 2

	<i>Biqiuni zhuan</i>	<i>Therīgāthā</i>
Self wishes	I. 1-6, I. 8-9, I. 11, I. 13, II. 2, II. 4-6, II. 8-9, II. 11, II. 14, II. 16, II. 20-22, III. 1, III. 3-4, III. 6, III. 11-13, III. 15, IV. 1-5, IV. 7-8, IV. 10-14	All of women except Nandā (19-20) and Jentī (21-22)
Other situations	None	Nandā (19-20) and Jentī (21-22)
Women with unclear information	I. 7, I. 10, I. 12, II. 11, 3, II. 7, II. 10, II. 12-13, II. 15, II. 17-19, II. 23, III. 2, III. 5, III. 7-10, III. 14, IV. 6, IV. 9	None

NOTES

1. *Taishō-shinshū-daizōkyō*, g, Vol. 50, pp. 934-48.

2. The main Pāli text used in this paper is the *Thera-* and *Therīgāthā* edited by Hermann Oldenberg and Richard Pischel. The numbers in the parentheses are the numbers of stanzas per poem.

3. According to K. R. Norman, Muttā (2) and Muttā (11) are separate individuals (p. xxiii).

4. Norman says that there are two Nandās in the *Therīgāthā*. They are different nuns with the same name. They came from different families (p. xxiii). Murcott says that Nanā (pp. 19-20) also called Abhirū pa-Nandā, was the daughter of a man named Khema, whereas Nandā (pp. 82-86) also called Sundarī-Nandā, was Mahāprajāpatī Gotamī's daughter (p. 135).







Forging Friendships: Three Traditions of Vietnamese Buddhism

Thích Nu Lieu Phap (Duong Thi Thanh Huong)

Buddhism reached Vietnam more than 2000 years ago, in the first century CE.¹ Geographically, Vietnam is like an intersection between India and China, which is why it is also called Indochina. In early times, people who traveled from India to China or vice versa, by land or by sea, had to cross Vietnam. Vietnam was therefore a good place for foreign business people as well as Buddhist monks to break their journey. By the end of the second century, Vietnam became a major Buddhist center in the region, commonly known as Luy-Lau. Here many Mahāyāna *Sūtras* and the Āgamas were translated into Chinese, including the *Sūtra of 42 Chapters*, *Anapanasati*, *Vessantara Jataka*, *Milindapanha*, and others.

Two traditions of Buddhism spread in Vietnam: Mahāyāna and Theravāda. Being close to China and being twice annexed by the Chinese, Buddhism in Vietnam was greatly influenced by the Mahāyāna Buddhism of China with its dominant schools of Chan, Pure Land, and Tantra. The Mahāyāna school is the most popular in Vietnam and has existed for more than 20 centuries, contributing a great deal to the protection and development of the country. About 70 percent of Vietnamese Buddhists follow this tradition.

The southern part of Vietnam was originally occupied by the Champa (Cham) and the Cambodian (Khmer) people who followed both the Mahāyāna and Theravāda traditions. As the Vietnamese conquered and annexed lands in the south in the fifteenth century, the dominant Vietnamese followed the Mahāyāna tradition, while the ethnic Cambodians continued to practice the Theravāda tradition.

Theravāda Buddhism was only introduced to ethnically Vietnamese people in 1940. At that time, a man by the name of Le Van Giang, a veterinarian, went to Cambodia to learn meditation in the Theravāda tradition. He became ordained there and was given the Dharma name Ho Tong. In 1940 he returned to Vietnam and established Buu-Quang Temple, the first Theravāda temple for Vietnamese Buddhists, at Go Dua, Thu Duc (now a district of Saigon).²

In 1957 the Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhist Saṅgha Congregation was formally established and recognized by the government. Through the efforts of pioneer teachers of meditation and all those who helped translate the Pāli texts into Vietnamese, supported by Ven. Narada from Sri Lanka, more and more Buddhists were attracted to the Theravāda tradition.

In 1946 another Buddhist school known as the Mendicants (*Khat Si*) was founded by Ven. Minh Dang Quang. He ordained himself, took the name of Minh Dang Quang, and started teaching the Dharma. He accepted many disciples, both male and female, and built many monasteries in the southern part of Vietnam. This school is a mixture of Mahāyāna and Theravāda. They select aspects of both traditions in their practice. Followers wear yellow robes, go for alms, maintain a vegetarian diet, and learn the doctrine from both the Mahāyāna and Theravāda schools.

Basically, these three schools all have the same foundations. They accept Śākyamuni Buddha as their teacher. They believe and teach the doctrines of the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, and dependent arising. They all reject the idea of a supreme being who created and governs the world. They accept the trainings of *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *pañña* without any significant differences. In addition, they all accept the truth of *anicca* (impermanence), *dukkha* (suffering), and *anatta* (no-self).

Apart from these similarities, there are also some points of difference between the three schools:

1. The Theravāda tradition carefully preserves all the rules laid down by the Buddha. They wear yellow robes, go for alms, take whatever food is donated, and practice meditation. Their ritual observances are in Pāli language. Meanwhile, Mahāyāna Buddhism adapts to the national culture and customs. Mahāyāna monks and nuns wear grey or brown robes, keep a strict vegetarian diet, customarily eat in the evening, and may drive cars, work in the field, and even have factories that produce tofu, soya sauce, and so forth, to support themselves. Their ritual observances are in the Vietnamese language. The Mendicants have also adopted the Vietnamese language in their chanting and keep a vegetarian diet like the Mahāyāna adherents.

2. Theravāda Buddhism emphasizes practical realities and meditation which lead to swift self-emancipation. Mahāyāna teaches the ideal and

stresses the goal of liberating all sentient beings, which will lead to complete enlightenment. Consequently, their service in society also differs. Theravādins organize meditation centers where all Buddhists, lay and ordained, can come to stay and practice meditation, and they offer Pāli and Abhidhamma courses for monks and nuns. Mahāyānists focus on preaching, opening orphanages and kindergartens, running clinics, aiding victims of natural disasters, and so on. The Mendicants are also very active in social activities.

3. All three schools of Vietnamese Buddhism ordain women, but only the Mahāyāna and Mendicant traditions accept *bhikkhunīs*. The *bhikkhunīs* of these two schools have their own monasteries. Some nunneries are well organized and have more than 100 nuns studying and practicing there. The *bhikkhunīs* are very active in social service; some of them work as teachers, nurses, or social workers. Some nuns even hold positions in the government and in the Vietnam Buddhist Saṅgha. Theravādin nuns mostly live in monks' temples. They observe either eight or ten precepts. They are very few in number and concentrate mainly on meditation practice. Recently, however, some nuns have started their own nunneries and at present there are three separate Theravāda monasteries for nuns only. In 2002 four nuns received the full ordination in the Theravāda tradition in Sri Lanka, but it may take a long time and much effort to establish a Theravāda Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in Vietnam.

Although there are some differences in theory and practice between these three schools, they co-exist harmoniously in the same country. Together they guide the spiritual life of the Vietnamese people. Each school tries to preserve its own traditions while respecting the contributions of the other schools. Vietnamese Buddhists are free to choose the school that is most suited to their particular temperament, and change from one school to another, as they like. If they wish, they can even learn from and support all three schools at one time. Even though there are some extremists who, due to a lack of knowledge and understanding, exalt their own school and disparage the others, most well-informed Buddhists know the history and value of each school. At the Institute of Higher Buddhist Studies, where monks and nuns of all the three schools are trained, students are instructed in both canonical and non-canonical subjects, including the doctrines of the three main Buddhist schools: Theravāda, Sarvastivāda, and Mahāyāna. For Buddhist ceremonies, such as those held on Buddha Jayanti Day, Buddhists of all three schools gather together and pray for the peace and prosperity of the country.

In 1981, after the liberation of the south, the Vietnam Buddhist Saṅgha was founded to unify all Vietnamese Buddhist schools and organizations. The Vietnam Buddhist Saṅgha has established an action program for national co-operation and harmony among all Buddhist schools. They have established a

system of monastic education and have been promoting friendship among the world's Buddhist organizations to help create peace on earth.

NOTES

1. Nguyen Lang, *Viet Nam Phat Giao Su Luan (History of Buddhism in Vietnam)*, Vol. 1, 1973.
2. Binh Anson, *Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam*, Buddhasasana CD-Rom Library.



Sexuality, Discipline, and Ethics

Elisa Nesossi

The Buddhist monastic community is a sort of “ideal society” whose members must adopt a high standard of conduct, including renouncing the pleasures of the senses. What are the rules that the *bhikṣu* and the *bhikṣuṇī* must conform to? Above all, what is the moral conception associated with this code of conduct? Speaking of sexuality in these terms means either explaining every disciplinary rule which prohibits every kind of sexual desire or trying to understand why the Vinaya compilers formulated such a wide body of precepts.¹ The main aim of my paper concerns the latter, namely, to link concepts such as celibacy and sexual abstinence to a specific conception of desire, purity, and corporality, and to explain how sexuality is connected with discipline and ethics, the Vinayapitaka, and the Dharma in general.

Celibacy: First Step on the Way to Extinguish Desire

Every member of the Saṅgha, regardless of whether he/she has received full ordination or not, is required to commit to sexual abstinence and celibacy. Admission into the monastic community means the complete subjugation of the sexual instinct through a long process of practice and meditation. Physical abstinence is only the first step. For monks and nuns, celibacy, often referred to by the Indian term *brahmacārya* (Chinese: *fanxing*), is a choice and a personal responsibility. Those who receive full ordination (Sanskrit: *upasampadā*, Chinese: *shoudajie*) devote themselves to voluntary abstention from sexual activity for as long as they live. In the Buddhist texts we often find the idea that celibacy means “a life of perfect holiness or purity.” In spite of their deeply

antisocial connotations, and therefore, in a sense, anti-Confucian character, these cardinal principles, derived from original Buddhism, have never been debated – not even in early Chinese Buddhism. This can be deduced from isolated literary evidence and from the early monastic codes of discipline. Sexuality, abstinence, and celibacy, within disciplinarian limits, were never considered a cultural dilemma and nobody tried to avoid this duty.

In the *Anguttara-nikāya* (Sanskrit: *Ekottariknikāyagama*, Chinese: *Zengyiaban jing*), the Buddha says that monks must live a celibate life “to eliminate the pleasures of the senses – to abandon evils, to free oneself from human passions, and to destroy the craving for existence.”² Since the sexual instinct is the strongest of human instincts, to restrain it requires great determination and great strength. That is why most of the ancient religions considered chastity and self-restraint as the most praiseworthy of human actions.

Sexual desire is regarded as one of the biggest obstacles in the journey leading to *nirvāṇa*. Sexual desire is really dangerous because it indissolubly binds human beings either to the continual cycle of *samsāra* or to the ties of familial lineage. On the one hand, sexual intercourse leading to procreation binds us to the duties of domestic life and is a detriment of spiritual practice; on the other hand, it shakes the foundations of the Buddhist doctrinal structure. Suffering or existential pain (a basic concept in the Four Noble Truths doctrine and principle underlying the Eightfold Noble Path) needs to be understood as the frustration of desire, as the failure of the continuous effort to fulfill a changing, non-permanent, and non-substantial reality. Attachment and desire are deeply-rooted in the ignorance of the “lack of self.” Freedom is accessible only to those who, in giving up desire, overcome ignorance. Attachment, passions, and desire are the most important elements that influence the will and determine the quality of an action which, in turn, by producing karmic activity, put the human being in the *samsāric* cycle. Passion, acts, and their retribution obstruct the way to liberation.

Although the various Buddhist traditions agree on the basic doctrinal questions, they differ in the acknowledgment of the problematic nature of these questions. In this regard, there is considerable discrepancy, particularly between the Hinayāna and Mahāyāna traditions. Even though I do not wish to go deeply into this matter, I want to consider those aspects that I can deduce from the codes of discipline, to highlight how sexuality and desire can assume a different meaning for the bodhisattva. Assuming the identification of *samvīti-satya* (truth of worldly convention) with *paramārtha-satya* (ultimate meaning or truth), in the Mahāyāna tradition, ultimate enlightenment is an affirmation of this reality purified of its negative aspects. As a consequence, a person who is really free acts without any attachment to action. From this point of view,

even sexuality, if motivated by compassion, is not a transgression, but a means of reaching enlightenment. From this perspective, passion can be transformed into an instrument useful to people, because it is motivated by the compassion that the *bodhisattva* feels for all sentient beings, and by a pure and detached mental attitude.

Sexuality and Rules of Discipline

Entering the monastic community requires compliance with the rules of discipline. This is the first actual step towards the elimination of sensual pleasures. The precepts cannot be considered to be commandments. Rather, they are guidelines that help the members of the Saṅgha control their physical and verbal actions and develop an awareness of the personal mental attitudes required for living harmoniously together.

The very first of the *pārājika* rules (the first group of rules in all versions of the Vinaya) is a precept that categorically forbids all kinds of sexual relations.³ In the Bhikṣu Vinaya, it is said that this rule comes from the case of Sudinna, a young man who left his family and wife to join the Saṅgha. His mother implored him to come back home to fulfil his filial duties and continue his lineage. After his sharp refusal, she organized a plot against him with the ex-wife, who had to seduce him and become pregnant by him. After some hesitation, he succumbed to his sexual instinct.

After more illustrative stories, we can find in the Vinaya the definition of the rules as follows:

If a *bhikṣu*, having undertaken the proper course of training of the *bhikṣus*, not having rejected the training and declared his weakness, should engage in sexual intercourse, even with an animal, this *bhikṣu* has fallen into a *pārājika*, and should not be in communion with others.⁴

As far as the *Bhikṣuṇī Prātimokṣa* is concerned, the first *pārājika* is almost the same:

If a *bhikṣuṇī* engages in the impure conduct of sexual intercourse, even with an animal, then that *bhikṣuṇī* commits a *pārājika* and is expelled from the order.⁵

Whereas in the Bhikṣuṇī Vinaya we find that only the first *pārājika* rule has to do with sexuality⁶ in the *Bhikṣuṇī Prātimokṣa* and the *Sūtravibhanga*, rules number five and six are also concerned with the relationship between *bhikṣuṇīs* and men. The story is told of a young and pretty nun, who, after having entered the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha, still feels passion for a man. Having the

opportunity to be alone with him and being full of desire, they embrace and caress each other. After becoming acquainted with this fact, Buddha laid down two additional *pārājika* rules for *bhikṣuṇīs*. The first of these *pārājika* is:

If a *bhikṣuṇī* full of desire has physical contact with a man with a lustful mind in the area between the armpits and the knees, be it touching, holding, stroking, pulling, pushing, rubbing up or down, lifting, lowering, grasping, or pressing, that *bhikṣuṇī* commits a *pārājika* and is expelled.”⁷

The second of these *pārājika* is:

If a *bhikṣuṇī* full of desire knows a man has a lustful mind, yet allows him to hold her hand, hold her clothes, and enter a secluded place where they stand together, talk together, walk together, lean on each other, and make an appointment to meet [to make love]. If a *bhikṣuṇī* transgresses these eight things, she commits a *pārājika* and is expelled.⁸

The precept that establishes chastity is accepted by the novice upon her entering the monastic community. During the ceremony of ordination (Sanskrit: *pravrajyā*, Chinese: *chujia*) the novice receives the ten rules (Sanskrit: *dasasila*, Chinese: *shijie*). The third of these is concerned with the prohibition of sexual activity.

In the *Bhikṣuṇī Vinaya*, in addition to the *pārājika* rules, there are also 29 different precepts concerning sexuality in other categories: three precepts in the *saṅghavaśeṣa* section and 26 in the *pāyantika* section. From the analysis of these rules of discipline emerge some important topics, such as the relationship between the two sexes and between the *Bhikṣu* and *Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha*, and the themes of homosexuality and masturbation.

With reference to lesbianism, the *Bhikṣuṇī Vinaya* adopts masculine terminology, regarding this kind of sexual activity as a mere imitation of the heterosexual relationship. Lesbianism is sometimes considered unimportant because, in some contexts, sexual activity is condemned only if it implies the emission of semen. Masturbation (this question is treated more widely in other versions of *Bhikṣuṇī Vinaya*, for example, in the *Mahāsaṅghika Vinaya*) is considered dangerous, but is treated as an infraction of the code of discipline only if the monk or nun who practices it is motivated by intention and lustful desire.

With regard to relationships between *bhikṣus* and *bhikṣuṇīs*, it is also necessary to mention the importance of the Eight Special Rules (Sanskrit: *gurudharma*, Chinese: *bajing fa*). Although these rules are accepted by a nun at the moment of her entering in the *Saṅgha*, they are not always strictly applied

in contemporary China, especially in small communities. Last year I visited a Chinese monastery where three nuns and seven monks live together. In this monastery, the sharing of responsibilities and division of labor is not based on gender but, rather, on seniority.

Sexuality and Ritual Purification

As with any other infraction, those who transgress the precepts which impose chastity on all members of monastic community cannot be considered pure and in harmony with the community. Hence, they are expelled. It is believed that impurity does not come from a physical contamination associated with sexual transgressions, but instead derives from a kind of “contamination” at the level of the will. From the Hindu perspective, speaking of impurity means to speak of corporeal impurity and physiological functions. In contrast, the Buddhist perspective maintains that purity is an ethical concept related to the mind, the will, and the path towards enlightenment. The Buddha’s teachings explain that freedom and wisdom are accessible only to those who, having practiced a path of purification, can overcome ignorance and attachment to this existence. The person who kills, steals, lies, commits adultery, or feels hatred, anger, or disappointment has not overcome such “cankers” (Sanskrit: *āsrava*, Chinese: *lou*) that pollute existence and can be considered impure. Purification does not mean the negation of the physical body or the negation of bodily functions. Purification means freedom from all these hindrances. Any given sexual act is, first of all, the result of a moral and psychological disturbance and only indirectly connected with the body. From this perspective, the body is only a channel through which individual intentions and volitions manifest themselves. The Buddha does not want his disciples to have feelings of disgust regarding their bodies; he simply wants them to understand the impermanence of these feelings and consequently to abandon misguided beliefs about their own bodies.

Purification is realized only through ritual action (in this case, a collective confession) based on completely inner ethical convictions. The removal of every impure bodily, verbal, and mental act comes with a deeply ethical attitude, and an accumulation of good actions, wisdom, and concentration. Just as good actions lead to complete purification, in the same way, bad actions constrain existence to a precarious state.

The *upoṣadha*, the ritual of collective confession and purification of the monastic community, is the first step toward a complete inner purification. Over time, the word *upoṣadha* has been given many different interpretations, but they are all concerned with the concept of purity. As a matter of fact, by the confession of every sin and every kind of desire, the individual’s vital spirit

and the spirit of the community are purified. Xuanzang defines *upoṣadha* as “growth”; Yijing explains it as “increasing of purity.” In the Chinese commentary on the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Bhikṣuṇī Prātimokṣa* (Chinese: *Genben sapoduobu lü*) in the Chinese Buddhist canon it is said that this ceremony “increases the good *dharma*s” and “purifies what is evil.”⁹ In the *Vinaya-mātrkā-śāstra* (Chinese: *Pinimu lun*, or *Treatise on the Origin of the Vinaya*), *upoṣadha* is explained as “purification.”¹⁰

The Qualifications for Receiving Ordination

In terms of the ordination ceremony, which is the first step toward gaining membership in the monastic community, there are prerequisites for membership in the Saṅgha that are related to sexuality. Admission into the monastic order is permitted only to those candidates whose integrity is not only moral but also physical, as evidenced by specific sexual features. It is interesting that virility and physical perfection are prerequisites typical of not only of the Buddhist tradition, but also of other religious traditions. In the Catholic Church, for example, only those who are healthy, virile, and without any kind of physical dismemberment can receive complete ordination.

Before receiving complete ordination, a candidate is sent out of the assembly and asked questions such as: “Are you pregnant?” “Are you a prostitute?” “Are you having sexual intercourse with men or boys?” “Can you control your bladder and bowel functions?” “Do you dribble?” “Can you control all mucus emissions?” “Are you a hermaphrodite?” I am uncertain about the meaning of this. It could have two very different meanings, either “Are your anus and vagina intact?” or “Are your anus and vagina joined?”

In this paper my purpose is not to exhaustively clarify the origins and the real meaning of these prerequisites or qualifications. Rather, I simply want to suggest some starting points for research. Let us begin from a very practical point of view. Since to be a member of the community means being able to accomplish specific tasks, it is necessary for each member to physically be able to meet the requirements of the Saṅgha. I think that this aspect was particularly important in very early times when the community consisted of wandering *bhikṣus* who had to be completely self-sufficient and self-responsible. The Buddhist doctrine, in this case the *vinayapitaka*, particularly stresses individual responsibility, which means that Saṅgha members are responsible for their own spiritual progress and their own physical care. Only those who are healthy can carry out the assigned tasks in order to further their own spiritual progress and that of the Saṅgha.

I believe that practical explanations are not sufficient to clarify the real meaning of these qualifications. It is also necessary to explain how these

qualifications can be connected with the meaning that Buddhism gives to sexuality and corporality. I have already mentioned that sexuality is negatively considered, because it is a result of desire coming from a non-enlightened mind. It would seem, then, that if desire is eradicated, then sexuality will also be eradicated. With some rare exceptions, Buddhism does not include the belief that in every human being there is an eternal, psychic, or spiritual self that takes up the body. Mind and body are not separated; the mental processes are directly due to corporeal processes and vice versa. When we speak of the individual or being, we are speaking of a combination, a psychophysical continuum, a physical and mental mix. As a consequence, the sexual act is a physical expression of the passion that influences the mind. The human being interiorizes external stimuli, and after absorbing them, manifests them through the body. Sexuality comes from a combination of mental activity, contingent external stimuli, and the karma accumulated in the previous lives.

Sexuality, from the physical point of view, is characterized by the genitals. From the mental point of view, it is a form of energy. Whereas the genitals (defined in some Buddhist texts as “secondary sexual traits”) start growing at birth, energy is formed at conception. This is a mental attitude conditioned by the karma of previous lives. When one can control this energy, one can also control the genitals. But if there is an excess of energy or a physical imbalance, both of which derive from negative karma, then one will experience difficulty and perhaps even be unable to control sexual desire, respect the rules of discipline, and realize the Buddhist Dharma.

The Buddhist ideal is that of a being whose sexuality is removed or at least transcended. The transformation from a “sexual state of being” to an “asexual state of being” can happen only when one can completely control one’s own sexuality. That is the last stage of the Buddhist soteriological path. According to some Buddhist texts, this transformation is simpler for a *bhikṣu*, because of his male nature. For a *bhikṣuṇī* this process is slower and more difficult. It is argued that because a woman’s body is more intimately involved in reproduction and impure bodily functions, women can more easily fall prey to passions and sexual desires. For a woman who has sexual imperfection, the path towards the asexual ideal is even more arduous. From the same perspective hermaphrodites, who have the energy and physical traits of both sexes, cannot aim at the asexual ideal. Bisexual beings, because of an excess of masculine and feminine energy, cannot maintain the discipline and the moral precepts regarding sexuality and consequently cannot live in harmony in the monastic community.

NOTES

1. Taking the Chinese monastic community as a reference, I especially refer to the Dharmagupta Vinaya.
2. *Anguttara-nikaya* II 26.
3. The first *pārājika*, the stories and the exceptions to this rule are reported in T. 1428, (XXII), pp. 568-575.
4. T. 1428, (XXII), p. 568 (*Sūtravibhanga*); T. 1428, (XXII), p. 1015 (*Bhikṣu Prātimoksa*).
5. T. 1428, (XXII), p. 714a12-13 (*Sūtravibhanga*); T. 1431, (XXII), p. 1031 (*Bhikṣuṇī Prātimoksa*).
6. T. 1428, (XXII), p. 714a12-13 (*Sūtravibhanga*); T. 1431, (XXII), p. 1031b26-c1 (*Bhikṣuṇī Prātimoksa*).
7. T. 1458, (XXIV), pp. 525a1-617a26.
8. T. 1428, (XXII), p. 716a24-27 (*Sūtravibhanga*); T. 1431, (XXII), p. 1031c2-c8 (*Bhikṣuṇī Prātimoksa*).
9. T. 1458, (XXIV), pp. 525a1-617a26.
10. T. 1441, (XXIII), pp. 546c6-626b12.







Bridging the Vinaya Traditions





Almost Equal: Obstacles on the Way to an International Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha

Karma Lekshe Tsomo

In theory, Buddhism is egalitarian, affirming that all sentient beings have equal potential to achieve perfect enlightenment. Because the goal of Buddhism is the transformation of consciousness, and consciousness has no gender, there should be no bar to women's equal participation in Buddhist practice. This egalitarian ideal is not always realized in Buddhist societies, however. It can be convincingly argued that women in Buddhist societies enjoy greater social freedom than women in many other societies, yet they do not enjoy full equality in Buddhist societies or institutions. Being "almost equal" is similar to being almost famous or almost pregnant. Either a person is famous or not, pregnant or not. Being "almost equal" is not good enough. It is not only an inadequate status; it is meaningless.

Three Sources of Inequality

The first source of inequality for Buddhist women, which can be traced to the early centuries of Buddhist history, was the institution of an additional level of ordination for nuns, the probationary period known as *śikṣamāṇā*.¹ Ostensibly this two-year probationary period was instituted to ensure that a candidate for *bhikṣuṇī* ordination was not pregnant. This additional requirement for nuns does not meet the rule of common sense, however, since even at the time of the Buddha it was common knowledge that the gestation period for human beings is roughly nine months, not two years. Another reason advanced to justify the two-year waiting period for nuns is that women require more

training than men, but this assessment is highly dubious and we must question its source. Certainly neither of the stated reasons for the two-year requirement are defensible today.

The second source of inequality for women in Buddhism is the requirement of dual ordination for *bhikṣuṇīs* (fully ordained nuns). Mahāprajāpatī, the first Buddhist nun and mentor of the initial *bhikṣuṇī* community, was ordained by the Buddha alone, without the participation of either the monks' or nuns' monastic communities (Bhikṣu or Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha). However, the ordination procedures described in the Vinaya (monastic discipline) texts require that a *bhikṣuṇī* receive ordination by both Saṅghas: first, from ten *bhikṣuṇīs* in the morning and, second, from ten *bhikṣus* in the afternoon of the same day. The ordination procedure for a *bhikṣu* requires only ordination by ten *bhikṣus*.² The reasoning given to justify this procedure is that, when female candidates were preparing for ordination in the early years of the order, they became embarrassed to answer questions related to sexuality (for example, "Are you an hermaphrodite?" "Do you have syphilis?" and so on). Because female candidates became embarrassed when male precept masters posed such questions, the Buddha recommended that female candidates first be ordained by nuns, who could pose these questions instead of monks.

The third and most blatant source of inequality that Buddhist women experience is that women in many Buddhist traditions today do not have access to ordination as *bhikṣuṇī*, or even as *śrāmaṇerikās*. The Buddha explained that a complete Buddhist society has four components: *bhikṣu* (fully ordained monks), *bhikṣuṇīs* (fully ordained nuns), *upāpakas* (laymen), and *upāsikās* (laywomen). Without these four constituencies, a society cannot be said to be truly Buddhist, in the full sense of the word. The establishment of a strong Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha should therefore be a priority in societies that consider themselves Buddhist. Instead, in Buddhist societies without a Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha, we find considerable opposition to its establishment. This opposition is based primarily on the claim that the *bhikṣuṇī* lineage does not exist, even though the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha does undoubtedly exist in many countries throughout the world. It is necessary to investigate more closely the reasons for opposing the establishment of a Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha in those traditions that lack one.

Reasons for Opposing the Full Ordination for Women

If we accept the undeniable fact that *bhikṣuṇī* ordination is available to women in certain Buddhist traditions, why do the other Buddhist traditions not simply invite *bhikṣuṇī* from those traditions to perform *bhikṣuṇī* ordinations and encourage the nuns in their countries to receive full ordination (*upasampadā*)? Alternatively, why do these traditions not encourage and assist their nuns to

seek full ordination in those countries where the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha currently exists? According to the Dharmagupta school of Bhikṣuṇī Vinaya, ten nuns who have received the *bhikṣuṇī* precepts and maintained the precepts purely for twelve years are eligible to conduct a valid *bhikṣuṇī* ordination for others.³ To ensure the continuity of the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha in a particular tradition, a substantial number of nuns must receive the *bhikṣuṇī* precepts, to ensure that the requisite number of ten fully qualified *bhikṣuṇī* precept masters will exist to conduct *bhikṣuṇī* ordinations and transmit the precepts to female novices in future years. Sanctioning the ordination of a number of *bhikṣuṇī* now is thus necessary to guarantee both the solid establishment of the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha in these countries. Further, regularly scheduled *bhikṣuṇī* ordinations are necessary to reasonably guarantee the future continuity of the *bhikṣuṇī* lineage.

Let us examine the reasons that are frequently cited to explain why the re-institution of the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha is not being endorsed and encouraged in the Theravādin and Tibetan traditions. The reasons that these traditions themselves put forward for hesitating to reinstate the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha are: (1) the *bhikṣuṇī* lineage does not exist; (2) the *bhikṣuṇī* lineage has not continued uninterrupted since the time of the Buddha and therefore is dubious or invalid; and (3) receiving the *bhikṣuṇī* lineage from the Mahayana (or Chinese) tradition would mean becoming a Mahāyāna (or Chinese) *bhikṣuṇī*. Let us refute these lines of reasoning one by one.

The first claim – that *bhikṣuṇīs* do not exist in the world today – is patently false. There are perhaps 10,000 *bhikṣuṇīs* in Taiwan, 8,000 in Korea, 7,000 in Vietnam, countless thousands in China, and thousands more in Canada, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, the United States, and other countries around the world. To deny that *bhikṣuṇīs* exist in the world today is therefore absurd. It is urgent that a census be conducted to determine the precise number of *bhikṣuṇī* that exist in each country. These statistics can then be disseminated to educate those who are unaware of the presence of the extant *bhikṣuṇī* lineages and to dispel the myth that there are no *bhikṣuṇī* in existence.

The second claim advanced to oppose the re-institution of the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha – that the *bhikṣuṇī* lineage has not continued uninterrupted since the time of the Buddha – is impossible to verify. It is as impossible to verify the uninterrupted continuity of the *bhikṣuṇī* lineage as it is to verify the uninterrupted continuity of the *bhikṣu* lineages, though the “purity” of the *bhikṣu* lineages is simply assumed, at least by their immediate adherents. Thus far, no one has been able to present evidence to support the claim that the extant *bhikṣuṇī* lineage has been interrupted. Chinese historical records exist to document the transmission of the *bhikṣuṇī* lineage from Sri Lanka to China in the fifth century. Chinese documents also record the existence of as many

as one million *bhikṣuṇīs* in China at certain periods of history. A variety of historical documents record the lives and accomplishments of *bhikṣuṇīs* in China from the time the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha was established in the fifth century until today. The spread of the *bhikṣuṇī* lineage to Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam, and other countries is also a matter of historical record and current research is bringing to light the achievements of these *bhikṣuṇīs* as well.

Some say that the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha could not possibly have survived the historical disruptions of Chinese society, especially the successive political repressions of Buddhism. This claim does not stand up under scrutiny, however. There have been four great persecutions of Buddhism in China: under the Northern Wei emperor Taiwu (446-452), the Northern Zhou emperor Wu (574-577), under the Tang emperor Wuzong (845), and during the Cultural Revolution (1965-75). The first three persecutions lasted only a few years each, Buddhism quickly recouped, and the *bhikṣuṇī* lineage survived intact. Even after 50 years of repression under the People's Republic of China and ten years of serious persecution and destruction during the Cultural Revolution – a period in which thousands of Buddhist temples were destroyed, hundreds of thousands of nuns and monks were killed, and countless Buddhist institutions were destroyed or fractured in China – somehow the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha managed to survive. The fact that the *bhikṣuṇī* lineage survived this period of persecution – by far the longest and the most serious persecution of Buddhism that ever occurred in Chinese history, extending over several generations – makes it clear that the *bhikṣuṇī* lineage could easily have survived the short-lived persecutions of earlier times. Although countless numbers of nuns committed suicide (by jumping into wells to avoid rape, for example), I have met Buddhists in China who escaped to the mountains and survived by eating roots, bark, berries, and the “food of *samadhi*” for up to 30 years. After 1982, when Beijing's policy toward religion relaxed slightly, these courageous nuns and monks began to re-inhabit and restore those monasteries that survived the persecution.

Some opponents claim that the Chinese *bhikṣuṇī* lineage is flawed, because *bhikṣuṇī* ordinations have occasionally have been conducted by the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha, alone, and not by both the Bhikṣu and Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha, as required in the Vinaya. This argument rests on the claim that a *bhikṣuṇī* ordination by *bhikṣus* alone is invalid. However, the Buddha never stated that a *bhikṣuṇī* ordination by *bhikṣus* alone is invalid. On the contrary, we know that the Buddha alone ordained the first *bhikṣuṇī*, Mahāprajāpatī. Furthermore, the Vinaya texts tell us that the Buddha was flexible in assessing the requirements for ordination and adjusted them, depending on circumstances. For example, although a full complement of ten *bhikṣus* is ordinarily required in conducting a *bhikṣu* ordination, in outlying areas where Saṅgha members were scarce, the Buddha recognized as valid a *bhikṣu* ordination conducted by only five *bhikṣus*.

From the fact that he made this exception, it can be inferred that the Buddha recognized special circumstances and sanctioned variances under certain conditions. Even though the Buddha is no longer available for consultation, I think it is safe to conclude that he would have preferred to see a vital Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha in existence, rather than to have none. Especially considering the critical questions facing contemporary human society, the presence of the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha would not only complete the four components of Buddhist societies today, but also has the potential to benefit both Buddhism and society at large.

The third claim advanced to oppose the re-institution of the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha – that receiving the *bhikṣuṇī* lineage from another tradition would mean becoming a follower of that tradition and abandoning one's own – is also indefensible. Theravāda proponents of this view assert that Theravāda nuns who receive *bhikṣuṇī* ordination in the Mahāyāna tradition thereby become Mahāyāna practitioners and no longer belong to the Theravāda tradition. Tibetan proponents of this view assert that Tibetan nuns who receive *bhikṣuṇī* ordination in the Chinese tradition thereby become Chinese practitioners and no longer belong to the Tibetan tradition. However, these views ignore the fact that the various schools of Vinaya developed centuries before Mahāyāna texts appeared in India and long before Buddhism spread to China. It is clear that subsequent historical and philosophical developments bear little relationship to the original practice of monastic discipline, which can be traced to the lifetime of the Buddha himself. Therefore, receiving ordination from the Mahāyāna (or Chinese) tradition does not entail becoming a Mahāyāna (or Chinese) practitioner. The three groups of Sri Lankan nuns who received *bhikṣuṇī* ordination in Los Angeles in 1988, Sarnath in 1996, and Bodhgaya in 1998 are cases in point. Despite the fact that these nuns received *bhikṣuṇī* precepts and training from Mahayana preceptors from China, Korea, and/or Taiwan, they have maintained their own traditions of Buddhist practice and have not defected to the Mahayana. Similarly, nuns practicing in the Tibetan tradition who have received *bhikṣuṇī* precepts and training from Chinese, Korean, Taiwanese, and Vietnamese preceptors have maintained their original traditions of Buddhist practice and have not defected to other traditions. These precedents make it clear that fears of losing nuns or diluting traditions are unwarranted.

Overcoming Obstacles

The dual ordination procedure for nuns developed within the Indian cultural context. However, if the reasoning behind it is that female candidates felt embarrassed to answer certain questions in front of monks, why are the

candidates required to answer the same embarrassing questions again in front of monks at a second ordination the same day? The reasoning given for instituting the dual-ordination requirement is internally contradictory. Requiring the nuns to answer the embarrassing questions in front of monks at the second stage would defeat the stated purpose of holding a two-stage ordination. If the embarrassing questions are posed by *bhikṣuṇī* precept masters during the first stage of the ordination process, there would be no need to repeat the questions again before *bhikṣuṇī* precept masters again, later the same day.

A dual ordination ceremony is not easy to arrange. The dual ordination procedure for *bhikṣuṇīs*,⁴ which necessitates assembling ten additional (*bhikṣuṇī*) ordination masters, makes it at least twice as difficult for a woman to receive a valid *bhikṣuṇī* ordination than it is for a man to receive a valid *bhikṣu* ordination. The fact that nuns generally receive less support than monks also puts women at a disadvantage in receiving ordination, since candidates are required to prepare certain requisites (robes, bowl, and so forth) to qualify for ordination, and are dependent upon the laity for their food. If nuns generally receive less support than monks even today, in an age of modern communications and transportation, we can reasonably assume that it was even more difficult for Mahāprajāpatī and the early community of Buddhist nuns to gather the necessities of life and the requisite number of precept masters, especially since they would have traveled to the ordinations by foot, subsisting on alms received along the way.

Not only did the dual ordination requirement make *bhikṣuṇī* ordination difficult, but it also made women dependent on the *bhikṣus* for their ordinations. For a nun to apply directly to the Bhikṣu Saṅgha for ordination, without receiving the preliminary ordination from the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha, is not strictly in accordance with Vinaya procedures. However, according to Guṇavarman, a fifth-century Kashmiri Vinaya scholar, a *bhikṣuṇī* ordination conducted by *bhikṣus* alone, although technically incorrect, is still valid:

At places where the conditions are complete, one must do things according to prescriptions.... It is an offense if *bhikṣuṇīs* do not receive their full ordination from both a preceptor and preceptress at a place where the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha exists.⁵

However, according to Guṇavarman:

If the two orders of the Saṅgha are not found in one country at the same time, female applicants might receive their full ordination from the order of *bhikṣus* alone and it would be considered legitimate.⁶

According to this view, even if the first stage of the *bhikṣuṇī* ordination is not performed as prescribed and the ordination procedure is therefore

not conducted strictly in accordance with the Vinaya requirements, such an ordination can still be considered legitimate. In Taiwan, many *bhikṣuṇī* ordinations have been performed by *bhikṣus* alone and these ordinations are recognized as valid.⁷ In fact, until recently, the majority of nuns in Taiwan were ordained in ordinations conducted by *bhikṣus* alone (albeit with *bhikṣuṇī* training masters present) and their ordinations are almost universally regarded as adequate and valid. The rationale most commonly cited for drawing this conclusion is that *bhikṣus* are presumably the final authorities in conducting ordinations. An ordination by *bhikṣus* alone is much easier and much less expensive to organize than a dual ordination, which may last from 30 to 45, or even 60, days in Taiwan.

Although Guṇavarman considered ordination by *bhikṣus* alone to be valid in places where conditions are incomplete, and in Taiwan ordination by *bhikṣus* alone is accepted a valid even when conditions are complete – that is, when the required number of *bhikṣuṇīs* are available – argue that nuns *should* participate in the ordinations of *bhikṣuṇīs*, for two reasons. First, I feel that the traditional procedure for *bhikṣuṇī* ordination should be followed carefully, not merely because it is a Vinaya tradition, but because conducting *bhikṣuṇī* ordinations in accordance with the Vinaya procedures will help gain acceptance for the *bhikṣuṇī* ordination in the Tibetan and Theravādin Bhikṣu Saṅgha, which currently lack Bhikṣuṇī Saṅghas. Since the Vinaya procedure for *bhikṣuṇī* ordination requires the participation of ten *bhikṣuṇīs*, I submit that following this procedure carefully will increase the chances that the ordination will gain acceptance and the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha will become firmly established in these traditions.

The second reason I support the inclusion of *bhikṣus* in the ordination process is that I believe nuns should be involved in their own ordinations. *Bhikṣuṇīs* should have a voice in deciding who joins the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha. It stands to reason that nuns, not monks, should be in charge of, or at least have a majority voice in, deciding who joins their communities.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama has repeatedly stated that a decision about establishing a Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha within the Tibetan tradition requires the agreement of a council of senior Saṅgha members. Other monks of both the Tibetan and Theravāda traditions agree that a council of senior Saṅgha members is needed to establish the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha in their traditions. The convening of a senior Saṅgha council to evaluate and determine whether the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha should be established sounds reasonable until we reflect that, because at present there is no Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha in the Theravāda or Tibetan traditions, all the members of such a senior Saṅgha council would necessarily be *bhikṣus*. Because monks in the Tibetan and Theravāda traditions have enjoyed exclusive control of the Saṅgha for centuries, the majority of monks

in these traditions currently demonstrate little or no interest in establishing a Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha. Under the circumstances, there is no guarantee that a council of *bhikṣus* alone would have the interests of nuns foremost in mind. Therefore, it is essential that any council convened to discuss or make decisions about the establishment of the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha include equal numbers of *bhikṣuṇīs* and *bhikṣus*. Only if the voices of *bhikṣuṇīs* are fairly represented in these discussions on the future of the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha can the decisions of such a Saṅgha council be considered valid.

The Rationale for an International Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha

Of course, not everyone is interested in becoming a nun. The vast majority of Buddhist women opt to live and practice as laywomen. It goes without saying that Buddhist laywomen can practice Buddhism to the fullest extent of their capabilities, just as nuns can. It also goes without saying that Buddhist societies need the dedicated efforts of laywomen to help create a healthy society, as well as to help Buddhism survive and thrive. Nevertheless, there will always be people in any given society who are inclined to contemplative life, and there is no way to justify preventing people who are so inclined, whether women or men, from participating fully in all aspects of contemplative life.

Equal ordination opportunities for Buddhist women must be achieved before Buddhists can claim that Buddhism is good for women. As long as women in any of the Buddhist traditions lack access to full ordination, it cannot be claimed that Buddhism supports gender equality. Partial or sporadic opportunities are insufficient. Proposing a substitute for *bhikṣuṇī* ordination is also insufficient, since Śākyamuni Buddha's original proposal is still workable and beneficial. The absence of equal ordination opportunities for women is an embarrassment to the Buddhist traditions, which are otherwise largely egalitarian, especially when many adherents claim that Buddhism offers equal opportunities for women. Buddhists, both those in traditions that offer equal opportunities for women and those in traditions that do not, need to take an active interest in working for gender equality in all the Buddhist traditions. Denying equal opportunities to women is no longer acceptable.

NOTES

1. For a thorough discussion of the *sikṣamānā* stage of ordination in the Dharmagupta Vinaya tradition, see Ann Heirman, "Some Remarks on the Rise of the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha and the Ordination Ceremony for *bhikṣuṇīs* according to the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya" *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 19:2 (1996) 33–85
2. In outlying areas, the required number of precept masters is commuted to a minimum of five *bhikṣus* in the case of a male candidate and a minimum of five *bhikṣus* and five *bhikṣuṇīs* in the case of female candidate.
3. Customarily, *bhikṣus* do not conduct ordinations (*upasampadā*) until they have trained under a qualified *bhikṣu* teacher (*acārya*) for a minimum of ten years. However, the *Bhikṣuṇī Prātimokṣa Sūtra* specifically prohibits *bhikṣuṇīs* from conducting ordinations until after they have trained in the precepts for twelve years: "If a *bhikṣuṇī* gives the full precepts before she has been a *bhikṣuṇī* for twelve years, she commits a *pāyantika*." See Karma Lekshe Tsomo, *Sisters in Solitude: Two Traditions of Buddhist Monastic Ethics for Women, A Comparative Analysis of the Dharmagupta and Mūlasarvāstivādin Bhikṣuṇī Prātimokṣa Sūtras*. (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 55.
4. Twelve *bhikṣuṇīs* are required in the Mūlasarvāstivādin Vinaya, both in the Chinese and Tibetan translations.
5. Quoted in Karma Lekshe Tsomo, "Prospects for an International Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha." *Sakyadhita: Daughters of the Buddha* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Snow Lion Publications, 1989), p. 248
6. Ibid.
7. Senior *bhikṣuṇīs* are always actively involved in the training of female candidates during *bhikṣuṇī* ordinations in Taiwan, but they do not always participate in *bhikṣuṇī* precept masters. In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in closer adherence to Vinaya procedures among *bhikṣuṇīs* in Taiwan.





The Application of Feminist Theory to the Spiritual Practice of Buddhist Nuns: The Case of the Eight Special Rules

Wei-Yi Cheng

The gap between theory and practice is usually examined from the perspective of how practice deviates from theory. However, here I wish to examine how theory can deviate from practice. The Eight Special Rules (*gurudharmas*) traditionally applied to Buddhist nuns have been the topic of much discussion. Reflecting on my fieldwork on nuns in Taiwan and Sri Lanka, I see these rules as a lens through which to discuss the imbalance between feminist theory and nuns' spiritual practice.

I was educated in the West and my interest in the Eight Special Rules owes much to academic trends in the West. Buddhists immigrated to the West in relatively large numbers in the late nineteenth century, but it was not until 1960s and 1970s that a large number of Western Buddhists began to emerge. Many Western Buddhists are feminists, including the well-known scholar Rita Gross. The reasons feminists give for following the Buddha's teachings vary, but their egalitarian values remain the same. As they begin to have more and more contact with Buddhist cultures, however, they are often shocked, confused, and even begin to doubt their reasons for following the Buddha's teachings, as they discover the inequality and hierarchy within Buddhist structures. Many Western Buddhists ponder why they want to follow a religion that is seemingly oppressive towards women. Kate Wheeler asks herself, "What *am* I doing in a religion whose formal expression is a highly defended, medieval, male, sexist hierarchy?"¹ In this context, the Eight Special Rules often become the focus

for challenge by Western Buddhist women. It is this emphasis on the Eight Special Rules in the academic context that peaked my interest and led me to formulate my theory about the spiritual implications of the practice of the Eight Special Rules for nuns.

As noted above, the Western discourse of the Eight Special Rules is not a recent phenomenon. As early as 1993, Rita Gross criticized the Eight Special Rules in her book, *Buddhism After Patriarchy*.² In Asia, there have also been grievances against the Eight Special Rules in recent years. For example, the Taiwanese *bhikkhuni* Ven. Zhaohui led a movement to abolish the Eight Special Rules in 2001 and the Sri Lankan *bhikkhuni* Kusuma Devendra challenged the validity of The Eight Special Rules in her 1999 Ph.D. dissertation. I have heard that a *bhikkhu* (monk) in Thailand has written a book questioning the validity of the Eight Special Rules. From this, it is clear that sentiment against the Eight Special Rules arises from all over the Buddhist world.

However, theories developed within the academic context may differ significantly from the actual practice of nuns. A Sri Lankan *bhikkhuni* told me that she believed the Eight Special Rules were a later invention, but due to social pressure, she was obligated to pay homage to *bhikkhus*. I found a similar phenomenon in my fieldwork in Taiwan. When responding to my survey, nearly all the nuns declared that they agree with and observe the Eight Special Rules, but they expressed various opinions about the rules in the interviews. Some regarded the Eight Special Rules to be spurious and some said that they observe the rules simply out of custom.

Why are there such differences of opinion? I will look at this question from several perspectives. First, these difference may have to do with the marginalization of gender issues within Buddhist studies as a whole. Even though it could be said that the topic of gender was a focus within Buddhist studies as early as the late nineteenth century, in the work of Caroline Foley and Mabel Bode,³ gender studies remain marginalized within the mainstream of Buddhist studies in the West. The field of gender studies in Buddhism has emerged only very recently in Taiwan and there still may not be much interest in gender issues among the Buddhist public. Additionally, Buddhists may even question the purpose of gender studies in Buddhism. Many nuns told me that their purpose in joining the monastic order is to seek liberation, and since the Buddha taught us to transcend appearances (such as the appearances of male and female bodies), there is no need to discuss gender inequality within Buddhism. As a consequence, the Eight Special Rules have not been a focus of their spiritual practice, and criticism regarding the Eight Rules either by academics or *bhikkhunis* is rarely noticed by the majority of *bhikkhunis*.

Second, we can look at the question from a cross-generational perspective. My feminist lecturers in the U.K. often complained that we younger women,

growing up in more equalitarian times, do not understand and fail to appreciate their efforts in seeking gender equality, because we can barely comprehend the social pressures that exist in severely patriarchal societies. The gap between generations also showed up in my fieldwork. In Sri Lanka, I encountered many elder ten-precept nuns who discouraged their young disciples' efforts to seek further education and/or *bhikkhunī* ordination. These senior nuns feared that they would be neglected or disrespected by their younger disciples if the younger generation received higher education and/or *bhikkhunī* status. Thus, we see that a single theory can cause different reactions among nuns of different generations. Feminist theory on the topic may not be perceived as libertarian, and may even be seen as detrimental to the interests of nuns themselves.

Third, in order to reduce the gap between theory and practice, we must pay attention to crosscultural communications. By “crosscultural,” I do not mean “one country, one culture;” it is important to recognize the existence of subcultures within cultures. For example, as a paper about the menstruation stigma in Taiwanese Buddhism was read at the Seventh Sakyadhita Conference in Taiwan in 2001, I overheard two Taiwanese nuns murmuring, “Foreigners are full of strange behaviors. They always say things that I have never heard of before.” This does not necessarily mean that the foreign researcher was wrong; more likely, the foreign researcher and the nuns are speaking from different subcultures within the Taiwanese Buddhist world. In other words, within Taiwanese culture there are many subcultures, and within Taiwanese Buddhist culture there are also many subcultures. The same logic can be applied to the Eight Special Rules. Although most Taiwanese *bhikkhunīs* claim that the Eight Special Rules do not pose any obstacles to their spiritual practice and daily life, this established practice may not satisfy Taiwanese academics in the field of gender studies, since, as academics, they approach the issue theoretically. To find the point of connection between theory and practice, one must cross subcultures.

Cross-cultural dialogue across nations is crucial, too. For one thing, we can learn from each other. As mentioned above, there have been many discussions on the Eight Special Rules in the West, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, and there are many valuable insights we can learn from each other. At the same time, nuns must let others understand why they choose to observe or not to observe the Eight Special Rules. If all Buddhist nuns except the Taiwanese *bhikkhunīs* observe the Eight Special Rules, and certain Taiwanese *bhikkhunīs* claim not to observe them, then Taiwanese nuns might be accused of not following the Buddha's teachings and be criticized by other Buddhists. Communications across cultures are thus necessary for understanding the choices that others make.

Fourth, whether it is to engage in crosscultural dialogue or to draw connections between theory and practice, it is essential to avoid ethnocentrism. For example, Rita Gross, a scholar who has contributed greatly to researching gender issues in Buddhist studies, claims, “Many of the most significant and necessary developments in Buddhism regarding gender issues will first be articulated by Western Buddhists.”⁴ From an Asian Buddhist point of view, this statement is not very convincing. For example, Chinese Buddhism has gone through various changes throughout history, and to claim that gender issues in Buddhist studies will first be articulated in the West is to ignore those changes. Buddhists in Taiwan are similarly ethnocentric, priding themselves on having a strong Bhikkhunī Saṅgha and claiming that “no Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in the world is as independent and prosperous as ours.” Ethnocentrism, such as that evident in these two examples, is not helpful for crosscultural dialogue and may even prevent theories developed in one culture from being heard or understood in another.

Ethnocentrism prevents us from looking at cultures as a whole. From a Taiwanese point of view, for example, nuns in the Theravāda traditions might be pitied because they are generally expected to kneel down before monks. The Taiwanese *bhikkhunī* whom I interviewed claimed that, in observance of the Eight Special Rules, they would kneel down before monks, but *only* inside the Buddha Hall. The fact that nuns have to kneel down before monks outside the Buddha Hall might appear as oppressive from a Taiwanese perspective, but in Sri Lanka I discovered that Sri Lankan culture overall expresses much greater respect towards elders and teachers than in Taiwanese culture. Not only do laypeople often kneel down before nuns and monks, but young laypeople also often kneel before lay elders. On occasion, young children even knelt down before me, as a way of showing respect. Hence, it is dubious to equate Sri Lankan nuns kneeling down before monks outside the Buddha Hall as evidence of oppression. The observance of this custom does not necessarily mean that it is easier for Sri Lankan *bhikkhunīs* to accept the Eight Special Rules than for Taiwanese *bhikkhunīs*. One elderly reclusive Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* told me that she often wondered about the reasons behind the rule that require a 100-year-old *bhikkhunī* to pay homage to a newly-ordained *bhikkhu*. I mention this simply to illustrate how important it is to look at cultures as a whole and avoid superimposing our own presuppositions and/or values when communicating with other cultures.

Fifth, it is very important to remember the influence of economic factors. Remembering economic factors will help us avoid what El Saadawi calls “cultural colonialism,” that is, the ways in which – through economically driven influences such as films, advertisements, multinational corporations – the wealthy “colonize” the poor, coercing the poor to fashion themselves according

to the culture of the wealthy.⁵ As we discuss ways to help Buddhist women in developing countries, we must remember that “helping” them does not mean forcing them to accept or adopt our culture. Taiwanese Buddhists, especially, must remember that, despite the fact that many Buddhist nuns in Taiwan are highly accomplished (for example, Ven. Shig Hiu Wan, the *bhikkhuni* founder of Hua Fan University, which hosted the Seventh Sakyadhita Conference in Taiwan), this does not indicate cultural superiority. The great achievements of Taiwanese nuns might simply be the result of economic well-being. I met many independent and determined nuns in Sri Lanka. Their independent spirit is similar to that of nuns in Taiwan, yet because the economy in Sri Lanka is not as prosperous as in Taiwan, they receive fewer donations from the laity and naturally are not able to do as much as Taiwanese nuns. We Taiwanese might offer to help our Buddhist sisters elsewhere, since we are financially better off, but we should not be arrogant, thinking that we are culturally superior to others. More importantly, we should try to avoid imposing our own cultural values on others.

It is sometimes argued that “cultural colonialism” is likely to come from the West, given the fact that the past few centuries have been a history of the expansion of Western power. At first, the West colonized the world with military power; now, the West colonizes the world with economic power. Through Hollywood films, MacDonald’s, Starbucks, and so on, the West forces the world to fashion itself according to Western culture. Whatever does not fit in with Western values is likely to be labeled as “oppressive” and/or “hierarchical.”⁶ In such a schema, Asian values can only hold second place to Western values. For example, at the Sakyadhita Conference in Taiwan, I heard an American laywoman complaining that nuns were treated “too well” and always given the front seats in the dining hall. Rather than seeking egalitarian treatment of monastics and laity, this complaint, in fact, places Western values (or the values of a particular Western subculture) above Asian values, which stress the importance of being humble and respectful to elders and teachers. Whether this complaint is based on the values of that particular American laywoman’s own subculture or the values of Western culture in general (despite the fact that “Western culture” contains numerous subcultures and thus various different values), it neglects Asian values and imposes Western values on Asian cultures. To do so is not egalitarianism; instead it creates a new hierarchy that is as oppressive to Asian women as patriarchy.

Another economic factor that wields great influence on religious culture is economic structures. We can develop various theories, prescribing why and how we should make certain changes in religions, but changes are unlikely to occur without changes in economic structures. As the central production unit shifts from families to factories, women become less bound by their families, because

they are able to seek a livelihood outside home. Therefore, individualism is usually stronger in industrial societies than in a non-industrial societies (and stronger in industrial cities than in agriculturally based villages), even though both may draw their values from the same broad cultural context. Accordingly, women in industrial societies generally have more autonomy than women in non-industrial societies to decide whether they want to support the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha or the Bhikkhu Saṅgha. The fact that the Eight Special Rules pose no obstacle to the daily life of Taiwanese *bhikkhunīs* may be the result of the adequate financial support and human resources offered to the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha by lay Taiwanese Buddhist women, such that the *bhikkhunīs* do not have to rely too much on the Bhikkhu Saṅgha. Economic structures influence the attitudes of the laity, which in turn influences religious practices. Hence, it cannot be said that the greater gender equality in Taiwanese Buddhist practice is the result of cultural superiority; it may simply be the result of differences in economic structures.

In this essay, I have discussed imbalances in the application of feminist theory based on Buddhist texts to nuns' spiritual practices in actual experience. Reflecting on my fieldwork experience, these imbalances between feminist theory and actual practice become starkly evident.

NOTES

1. Kate Wheeler, "Bowling, Not Scraping," in *Buddhist Women on The Edge: Contemporary Perspectives from the Western Frontier*, ed. Marianne Dresser (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1996), p. 57.
2. Rita M. Gross, *Buddhism After Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993).
3. Yuzhen Li, "Bhikkhunī yanjiu: fojiao yu xingbie di jiaoshe," *Dharma Light Monthly*, January 2002.
4. *Buddhism After Patriarchy*, p. 25.
5. Nawal El Saadawi, "Why Keep Asking Me About My Identity?" in *Postcolonialism: Critical Concepts* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 7-24.
6. Ien Ang, "I'm a Feminist, but...: 'Other's Women and Postnational Feminism," in *Feminism and "Race,"* ed. Kum-kum Bhavnani (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).







Bridging the Roots and Bridging Boundaries: Tracing the Roots of the *Bhikṣuṇī* Tradition

Roseanne Freese

The Buddha ordained his foster mother 2,600 years ago and made her perhaps the world's first ordained nun. Through this one action, Buddha elevated the status of women as none has done before. Although Mahāprajāpatī had to reason with her adopted son three times, he finally admitted the reasoning of her arguments and ordained her and 500 others, creating the first Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha. 1,000 years after the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa*, two groups of Sri Lankan women went forth to bring the Dharma to China. The Buddha thus originated the Saṅgha, or organized Buddhist community life. His teachings made possible the social means of liberation for all people, regardless of race, caste, family status, and gender. The Buddha offered the Saṅgha as a way of life and as a means to teach and transmit the Dharma. This made possible the world's first diplomatic mission by women. Two groups of women, some no more than teenagers, set forth on a 5,000-mile journey from Sri Lanka to China in 429 and 432 CE.

This adventure is mentioned in a number of the 65 biographies contained in the *Biqiuni Zhuan* (*Lives of the Nuns*), a sixth-century work by Bao Chang, and, to a lesser degree, in the *Gao Seng Zhuan* (*Lives of Eminent Monks*), a collection of 205 biographies compiled by Hui Jiao around the same time. Senarat Wijayasundara, in his excellent article "Restoring the Order of Nuns to the Theravādin Tradition," observes that there is no Sri Lankan chronicle mentioning this important event and that it comes to us only from Chinese sources.¹ These Chinese histories, however, contain many conflicts and omissions in the dating and location of events. Even when the authors do

provide dates and locations, the plethora of competing monarchs and their separate imperial calendars and capitals make dating and geography complex and trying. Moreover, Bao Chang often portrayed imperial support of the Saṅgha (both monks and nuns) as something automatic, which in many cases was not the case.

To clarify the order and location of events, dynastic histories are essential. Once the discrepancies, digressions, and discontinuities in the stories are ironed out, several interesting patterns emerge. For example, when one begins to count the number of women's monasteries mentioned in the accounts, virtually 90 percent of them are in one region alone – the great citadel of Jiankang, which was the capital of the Eastern Jin and Song Dynasties, and today is Nanjing in Jiangsu Province. Jiankang was also known as Jianye in the fourth century. Both biographers were residents of Jiankang when they wrote their collections, but whereas Hui Jiao wrote extensively of monks living throughout all of China, Bao Chang focuses his accounts on just one region, Jiankang, though he does open his work with 13 biographies of nuns from central China. Bao Chang published *Biqiuni Zhuan* around 516,² while Hui Jiao wrote *Gao Seng Zhuan* in 530.³ Whatever materials were accessible to Hui Jiao must have been accessible to Bao Chang as well.

Another pattern is that while Hui Jiao extensively documents the activities of foreign and native monks for hundreds of years in and around the Han, Western Jin, and Wei capitals of Chang An, Luoyang, and Pengcheng, Bao Chang says little about events in western and northern China. Instead, Bao Chang concentrates his chronology on Jiankang. He reveals generations of rich detail on the formation of the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha in Jiankang nearly 200 years prior to the Sri Lankans' arrival. Hui Jiao was a careful historian and, although he mentions women infrequently in his *Lives of Eminent Monks*, the accounts he gives (roughly a dozen) support the incidents mentioned by Bao Chang, especially the accounts of those monks who served as the nuns' preceptors, gurus, and mentors. Perhaps the absence of biographies of women prior to 300 CE is not due to a loss of memory or disinterest by the Chinese and Buddhist elites in the affairs of women, but altogether different reasons, which make the arrival of Tessara and her sisters all the more important.

The ordination of the first nuns in China occurred during one of the most war-torn eras in Chinese history. The era of the Sixteen Kingdoms and Northern and Southern Dynasties, which span the fourth and fifth sixth centuries, is very poorly understood and the interaction between Buddhist doctrine and society virtually unexplored. We know that Buddhism expanded the horizons of individual freedom and inspired debates on critical issues in China's intellectual development, including the relationship between family and the state, the religious order and imperial authority; and between

indigenous religious traditions and foreign ideas. Studies of the period by Chinese, Japanese, and Taiwanese scholars make only a passing reference to the 65 biographies contained in Bao Chang's *Biqiuni Zhuan*, and do not explore the impact the ordination of women had on Chinese society, Chinese politics, and foreign relations. When dealing with the 205 accounts mentioned in the *Lives of Eminent Monks*, Asian and Western scholars have focused most of their attention on the doctrinal, scriptural, and philosophical developments rather than on the new avenues of trade, social choices, and political influence that Buddhism made possible. Research on the achievements and impact of China's first nuns has just begun with Kathryn Tsai's scholarly translation of the *Biqiuni Zhuan* in 1972 and Karma Lekshe Tsomo's numerous works regarding the *bhikṣuṇī* lineage and Vinaya of the past two decades. We in the west have only begun to discover the riches of Buddhism and cannot afford to miss acquiring a full understanding of the third of the Three Jewels, the Saṅgha, especially the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha.

The first group of eight nuns, who were actually *śrāmaṇerikā* or novices, arrived by boat at Jiankang in 429 CE and moved into a temple named Jing Fu Si.⁴ They were too young to officiate as preceptors for a dual ordination ceremony, however, so a second group of nuns was sent for. Eleven women, led by the elder Tessara, arrived in 432.⁵ Two more years passed while the Sri Lankans worked to acquire proficiency in Chinese and the Chinese women candidates worked to acquire proficiency in the Bhikṣuṇī Vinaya, of which a number of key works had been acquired and translated just a few decades earlier. Through the efforts of Tessara and her disciples and the support of monks Gunavarman and Saṅghavarman, more than 300 women were ordained in Jiankang in 434, thus transmitting for the first time in Buddhist history the *bhikṣuṇī* lineage from South Asia to East Asia.

Early widely scattered accounts related that unnamed women crossed unnamed passes to reside in unnamed monasteries. By the fourth century, the transformation was swift, no doubt largely due to the imperial support that it had begun to receive. During the era of the Eastern Jin (317-420), central and eastern China was home to no less than 1,768 monasteries and over 24,000 members of the Saṅgha. Ten of these monasteries were founded by either an emperor or empress.⁶

According to Bao Chang, China's first nun was Jing Jian, who belonged to an Indian spiritual lineage. Works relating to the ordination of nuns had begun to arrive in China during the middle part of the fourth century. Around 355, the monk Seng Jian brought back from Scythia a copy of *Sengzhini Jiemo* (*Rules of the Nuns*) and *Ni Jie* (*Nun's Precepts*) of the Mahāsāṅghika Sect.⁷ The foreign monk Tanmoji duo translated these works in 357 and this effort ignited Jing Jian's interest in ordination and led her to become China's first

nun.⁸ Soon thereafter, Jing Jian and four of her disciples received the nun's precepts according to these works on a Dharma dais erected by the monk Tanmojieduo. Before her passing in 361, Jing Jian went on to use the newly translated rules to ordain her disciple, An Ling Shou, with the participation of the Kuchan monk Fotucheng.⁹ Although the exact date of her disciple's passing in the late fourth century is unknown, An Ling Shou lived a full and vigorous life, founding some five or six women's monasteries in the Luoyang area and guiding more than 200 disciples.¹⁰ Unfortunately, in his *Lives of the Nuns* Bao Chang does not record the names of the nuns the An Ling Shou ordained, so the descent of this lineage is lost. The precedent of ordination, however, although simplified, was not lost.

The Chinese monk Dao Chang immediately challenged Jing Jian's ordination, putting forth a circular arguing that as there was no Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha in China and therefore no transmission could take place.¹¹ Bao Chang notes that Dao Chang's objections were overruled, but does not say by whom or how. While Dao Chang withdrew from the debate, this challenge hung over the heads of the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha in China until the arrival of the Sri Lankan nuns half a century later. The five women became recognized as the first nuns of China, even though their ordination did not include a two-fold or dual assembly of both monks and nuns.¹² The great monk Hui Yuan, who founded the Pure Land School and the Lotus Society, was also a patron of the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha. Sometime around the year 400 CE, during his more than 20-year stay in the mountains of Lushan in Jiangxi Province, he wrote China's first commentary on monastic law for nuns, the *Biqiuni Jie Du Xu* (*Commentary on the Nuns Precepts*).¹³ By 400, both monastic texts and practices regarding the ordination of women were well-known throughout eastern China.

The world that the Sri Lankans left behind was a glowing prosperity of Buddhist growth where king and householder, merchant and scholar, supported the Saṅgha with energy and enthusiasm. The world that greeted them in China was violent. The century preceding the arrival of the 19 women was one of the darkest and most complex in China's history. Riven apart by a 200-year old civil war, China was split into as many as 21 different kingdoms, where Chinese, Tibetans, Mongolians, and Central Asian Turks fought one another for control of continental China. Sons deposed fathers, vainglorious generals overthrew righteous rulers, and the insane sat upon the throne. Some kings knew nothing of the Buddha, while others sought out monks and nuns, not for their ability to teach wisdom and compassion, but for their power to exorcize ghosts and prophesy the outcome of battles. In the midst of these trying times, Daoist and Confucian leaders were competing for imperial favor and questioned the validity of the new doctrines that could undercut their influence. Awaiting the women was not a disciplined civil state, but a vast chaos of military reprisal,

financial insecurity, personal frustration, and public cynicism.

China's warring kings sought out religious guidance not so much for moral change and cleansing, but for political advantage and a façade of respectability. Few kings, even those who financially supported the Saṅgha, could be called moral or upright. A few gave millions to build temples, translate sūtras, and feed the hungry, but they also led their armies on paths of destruction. Other monarchs sought the elixir of immortality and studied Daoist practices for cultivating the body, yet remained oblivious to the Daoist-led revolts within their own realms. Within just one year after the arrival of the first group of Sri Lankan nuns in 429, monks by the thousands rose up to protect their livelihood from the attacking Northern Wei armies in Guisi, a kingdom 1,000 miles to the west. The monk Tanwuchan, who had brought the bodhisattva precepts to China from Central Asia, was assassinated in the far west in 439 by his own imperial mentor, the king of Liang. These events, though far removed, brought monastic refugees to the Song capital of Jiankang in the east. The Song had only established their dynasty in 420, overthrowing the Eastern Jin, whose last years closed with military revolts, usurpation, rule by imbecile kings, and worse. These refugees included in their number foreign and Chinese monks, translators, and nuns. Arrival in the peaceful and stable Song capital meant security, opportunity, hope, and, for the Saṅgha, a warm welcome.

Despite this uncertain state of affairs, the Eastern Jin Empire managed to acquire an excellent reputation overseas, and it was to this kingdom that King Mahanama of Sri Lanka sent 19 Buddhist nuns on what would be the world's first diplomatic mission conducted by women. The Sri Lanka the nuns had left was a land of great religious strength. In the century prior to 429, Sri Lankan religious growth was explosive. During the reign of King Siri Meghavanna, who ruled from 303 to 331, the Maha Vihara School was restored to ascendancy and the Temple of the Universal Buddha, Sri Lanka's first overseas temple, was established in Bodhgaya.¹⁴ Soon thereafter, in 311, the Sri Lankan town of Dantapura received a gift of a tooth of the Buddha from the Indian kingdom of Kalinga.¹⁵ Religious efforts soared to new intellectual heights as King Mahadhammakathi in 389 endowed the effort to translate the Buddhist canon from Sanskrit into Pāli.¹⁶ In 410, the great patron of Buddhism, King Mahanama – the King of the Great Name – ascended the throne. During his 22-year reign,¹⁷ King Mahanama would personally receive the greatest pilgrim-monk, Fa Xian in roughly 409;¹⁸ witness the completion of the translation of the Tripitika; and, endow the world's first diplomatic mission by women.

News of the strife in China did not reach overseas. King Mahanama had heard of Eastern Jin imperial patronage of Buddhism and knew that it was not limited to hosting Dharma lectures, offering vegetarian banquets, sponsoring the translation of sutras, or even the founding of *vihāras*. Eastern

Jin Emperor Xiao Wu, for example, requested one nun, Miao Yin, to provide advice concerning political appointments.¹⁹ Such was Emperor Xiao Wu's piety that the King of Sri Lanka in 398 decided to present him with a four-foot tall Buddha made of jade. Unfortunately, the emperor had already passed away when the mission arrived ten years later.²⁰ There is also a story in the biography of Kumarajiva's disciple, the monk Dao Rong. It is said that a *brahmin* from Sri Lanka had heard of Kumarajiva's reputation and the piety of the Chinese. The *brahmin* traveled to Chang An to meet the monks. A public debate was arranged, but instead of Kumarajiva facing the *brahmin*, the monk chose his Chinese disciple, the monk Dao Rong, to debate the challenger. To the *brahmin*'s surprise, the Chinese monk knew the religion of the Buddha better than he did and in humility the *brahmin* embraced Dao Rong's feet and returned to Sri Lanka.²¹ China's reputation in the Sri Lankan kingdom must surely have soared.

It was also during this era that the great pilgrim and scholar monk Fa Xian left the central Chinese kingdom of Latter Qin and initiated his 12-year journey to India. Departing from the Qin capital of Chang An in 399, he did not return until 412.²² His return, however, did not take him to Qin, but to the Eastern Jin capital of Jiankang. While in Sri Lanka, Fa Xian undoubtedly told King Mahanama's court and the Saṅgha elders stories of the Qin Emperors' enthusiastic support of Buddhism. Then, rather than returning to China via India using the passes, languages, and networks with which he was now familiar, the great monk chose to return by commercial ship over the ocean. Heavy seas, however, forced Fa Xian's ship to land in the kingdom of Dayipoti, which some today regard to be in Sumatra and others in Java.²³ After three to five months there, Fa Xian took another merchant ship bound for Guangzhou. Beset by a typhoon and with food and drinking water virtually exhausted, the ship pushed on and eventually landed at Rong Mountain in the Qingdao area of the Shandong peninsular, 500 miles north of Jiankang. Alive with all his work intact, Fa Xian made his way on foot, arriving in Jiankang in 412.

General Liu Yu established the Song Dynasty when he declared himself Emperor Wu in 420. General Liu Yu had 16 years earlier overthrown the usurper Xuan Xuan, a man who, if not for the efforts of the great monk Hui Yuan, would have closed all the monasteries in Eastern China.²⁴ Although ruthless, Liu Yu did not forget his origins; the plow and yoke he used in his youth were formally mounted in his palace.²⁵ The emperor was also a great friend of Buddhism. After ascending to the throne, he held a vegetarian feast in his inner palace and bestowed food and valuables on the monk Dao Zhao.²⁶ His empress, Madame Zhe, founded a monastery for women, Qing Yuan Si, in Jiankang sometime between 420 and 422.²⁷ The year 420 witnessed the construction of no less than ten new Buddhist monasteries in Jiankang

alone.²⁸ Emperor Wu was also a great benefactor of the Saṅgha and in 422 he personally funded the building of 28 halls for the ordination of 1,000 monks at Hua Cheng Si in nearby Yangzhou in 422.²⁹ Through his sponsorship, he had his son, who would become Emperor Wen in 424, receive the Three Refugees, not from a monk, but from the nun Ye Shou.³⁰

For the first time in Chinese historical record, the number of monasteries for women grew like bamboo after a spring rain. While accounts mention only nine women's monasteries built in the Jiankang area before 400, 45 more were founded within the next 100 years.³¹ Women's monasteries also grew rapidly in size and complexity. Zhi Xuan Si, for example, was home to both monks and nuns³² and by no later than 440, Qing Quan Si was home to some 200 nuns.³³ One woman's monastery, Jian An Si, would become home to several famous nuns. Jian An Si is where the nun Bai took Seng Jing as her disciple in 402 when Seng Jing was still an infant.³⁴ This is the same Seng Jing who, in attempting a pilgrimage to India on her own, attained the honor of being the first to meet Tessara before she and the Sri Lankan women arrived in the capital.³⁵ The nun Bao Xian, who was about the same age as Seng Jing, went forth at the age of 19 and joined this community sometime around 420.³⁶

Two years after Emperor Wu passed away in 422, his son Wen came to the throne. Throughout Wen's reign, which ended in 453, he proved to be an even greater patron of Buddhism than his father. He received ambassadors from several South and Southeast Asian Buddhist kingdoms, including Funan, Heluoshi, Aluodan, Shepuopuoja, Sri Lanka, and Jiabili of India,³⁷ and was extolled far and wide for his love of the Three Jewels. One Sri Lankan ambassador wrote, "I, like you, desire to save those who are difficult to transform, through the upholding the True Law. Thus I have asked these four monks to bring you 200 sets of white cloth and an enshrined ivory likeness [of the Buddha] as a testimony to your faith."³⁸

Emperor Wen maintained four academies: for Confucian studies, transcendental studies (*xuan xue*), historical studies, and literary studies. He appointed Lei Ci Zong to head the academy for Confucian studies and the devout Buddhist He Shang to head the academy of transcendental studies, both of whom were disciples of the monk Hui Yuan.³⁹ Emperor Wen also met with the Central Asian monk Gunavarman and asked him what sustained his belief and inspired him to travel 10,000 leagues. Gunavarman replied, "The Way is in the heart and not in actions. The Dharma is within oneself and not in others. If the way of kings and peasants are different, such that the peasant is poor, thievish, and brutal, imperial edicts will not impress him. If one does not refine oneself, then what purpose do you serve? Kings and emperors regard the four seas as home and the 10,000 people as their children. Utter one righteous word and the men and women of the nation are moved. Offer but

one benevolent act and the people live in peace. Execute not the young, nor call to labor the aged. Do these things, and the rain and sun, cold and warmth will come in due season and all of nature will unfold her wealth. It is for these great and virtuous things that I abstain from flesh and refrain from killing. Thus, one life is not worth my eating past midday.” With this, Emperor Wen pounded his table, exclaiming, “While the vulgar man is lost in things far away, the monk reveals the immediate. The way of those who dwell on far away ideas is false, while those who consider the monk’s teachings at hand deal with truth. What you say is true; this is the way to find a bright and expansive enlightenment. With you, I can discuss serving Heaven and guiding the people.” Emperor Wen then awarded Qi Yuan Si as Gunavarman’s residence.⁴⁰

In the sixth year of the Yuan Jia reign era of Emperor Song Wen (429), the nuns Hui Guo and Jing Yin⁴¹ held a meeting with Gunavarman after his arrival in the capital. Hui Guo questioned him, “Nowhere in China have any of the nuns here received their monastic vows. But if we go back to the time of the very first nun, Buddha’s stepmother Mahāprajāpatī, the highest example, and compare it with the current situation, is there any difference?” Gunavarman responded, “No, there is no difference.” Hui Guo continued, “But if, as recorded in the available literature on the regulations, the ordination master is at fault for ordaining women here, then there must be some difference?” Gunavarman replied, “If within a group of nuns there is one who has not studied the Dharma for two years prior to ordination, then this woman’s ordination would be an offense.” Hui Guo again asked, “Although originally there were no nuns here in China, there were nuns in India, correct?” Gunavarman responded, “By the regulations, ten monks are necessary for the complete transmission of the monastic vows, but only five are necessary in frontier areas. China is just such a place and we cannot proceed but by the regulations.” Hui Guo asked, “How many leagues are sufficient to be considered a frontier?” He replied, “Anywhere beyond a 1,000 leagues, where mountains and seas cut off one place from another, is a frontier.”⁴²

By 429, China was a frontier no longer, because in that same year, Nanti, a foreign boat captain, brought eight Buddhist nuns from Sri Lanka to the Song capital. The women’s journey was no straightforward matter. The countries of Burma, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Cambodia were just receiving their first Buddhist pilgrims, and their political leadership and commercial means had yet to be consolidated. While monks traveling overland through the mountain passes of Central Asia faced the dangers of extreme climate and isolation, they could count on a warm welcome from the many established Buddhist kingdoms. The Sri Lankans’ sea route, while far quicker, left them vulnerable to pirates and the vagaries of typhoons, which could either immediately destroy

their craft, or drive them hundreds of miles off course and without benefit of compass and long-term supplies. Even the great monk pilgrim Fa Xian, in his return from the South Seas in 411, overshot and landed in Shandong Province, some 500 miles to the north of Jiankang.

The travel might have taken only six months, just as Fa Xian was able to do it in only six months in 411. The same man, who was named Nanti (or perhaps Nandi in Sinhalese), was the captain for both groups of Sri Lankan nuns. Nanti also captained the journey of the monk Gunavarman from Jiaozhou, who arrived in Jiankang in 424 upon the personal invitation of Emperor Wen.⁴³ Nanti was most likely a wealthy sea merchant, for the Chinese, who are scrupulous in the documenting of titles, make no mention of any rank. To what extent the rulers of Sri Lanka and other Southeast Asian kings relied on maritime merchants in lieu of personal navies is an inviting question for further research.

Although there is no explicit documentation on the nuns' route, from the accounts of other travelers and research by modern archaeologists, a number of stops were highly likely. Their journey no doubt began with a passage through the Straits of Java, with perhaps a stop in one of the thousands of islands that make up the Indonesian archipelago. Another stop might have been Oc Eo, the great port of Champa in what is today Cambodia. A major stop may have been Luy Lau, the great Buddhist port city in Bac Ninh Province of Jiaozhou. This port, in what is today northern Vietnam, had been active in the acquisition and translation of *sūtras* as far back as the beginning of the first century CE. One last stop may have been Panyu, the southern port city of Guangdong Province, which had been home to the Saṅgha since the third century. After six months of sailing with the tradewinds, the journey ended in the Yangtze River port of Jiankang, 100 miles inland from the swampy, undeveloped eastern Chinese coast. While travel by sea between India, Sri Lanka, and Jiaozhou dates as far back as the time of Christ, it apparently did not reach eastern China until 265, when Fa Xing Si of Guangzhou became the first stop of ocean-going monks traveling from India.⁴⁴

Prior to the arrival of Tessara and her second group of 11, hundreds of monks and a handful of nuns braved the icy, windswept mountain ranges and desert plateaus that separate China from India. There is one isolated account of women crossing the great mountains and deserts of Central Asia sometime during the third century. Cai Hong Sheng, a Chinese historian of the time and author of *Nigu Tan (Talking About Nuns)*, mentions an account in the eighth and ninth chapters of *Fa Yuan Zhu Lin (Pearls of the Dharma Retreat)* that a group of Buddhist nuns arrived in China from India in the third century. The group originally consisted of 15 nuns, but three died during their journey in the snow-covered mountains and two more disappeared in the night. Ten

made it to China and spent ten years teaching and ordaining others, from the northern Chinese kingdom of Wei to the eastern Kingdom of Wu. During this time three more died, leaving only the remaining seven to return home by ship via the South Seas.⁴⁵ Since no mention of these women is made in the *Biqiuni Zhuan* or *Gao Seng Zhuan*, one can only speculate about how the seeds of their transmission were planted.

In his *Gao Seng Zhuan*, Hui Jiao tells again and again of how war compelled monks to move away from Chang An and Luoyang in central China. In Chang An, home to the Saṅgha for nearly 400 years, sheer terror had broken loose. The Turkic Xiongnu took over the capital of Chang An and set up the Xia State in 407, then overthrew the Latter Qin in 417, forcing the Saṅgha to disperse from the north.⁴⁶ Buddhist monasteries were destroyed and thousands of Saṅgha members were killed.⁴⁷ Those that survived fled for their lives. Monks fled toward the southwest into Shu or Sichuan Provinces, south to Lushan in Jiangxi Province, and to the southeast into Jiankang. Although the first imperial reception of monks may have occurred as early as 67 CE, when Emperor Ming's envoy Cai Pei escorted the monks Zhu Falan and Shemoteng into the Han capital of Luoyang, there are no accounts of monasteries anywhere south of the Yangtze River prior to 250 CE. Jiankang became the endpoint of not one, but two silk routes. The Song capital was the easternmost point for those (mainly Chinese and Central Asian) who came by land and the northernmost point of those (mainly South Asian or of mixed South Asian and Southeast Asian parentage, such as the Monk Hui An) who came by sea.

After arriving by ship in 429, the first group of Sri Lankan nuns moved into Jing Fu Si.⁴⁸ This temple was one of the greatest monasteries for women of this era. The governor of the northeastern province of Qing donated land in Jiankang for the construction of the monastery in 422. He then appointed the nun Hui Guo to serve as its first director. Hui Guo was surnamed Pan and came from Xun County in Anhui Province.⁴⁹ She was an ascetic and was known for her pure practice of the monastic rules. Whatever was donated to her, she redistributed to her disciples.⁵⁰ One of her first disciples was Fa Bian of Danyang, south of Jiankang. Fa Bian was deeply admired by Prince Yu who was the governor of Yang Province.⁵¹

Upon their arrival, the women of the first Sri Lankans group were amazed to see nuns already present in China. They queried Seng Guo on whether other foreign nuns had preceded them. They wondered, "How can Chinese nuns receive the monastic precepts without the full presence of the two types of Saṅgha – monks and nuns?" Seng Guo replied that they had received their monastic vows from monks alone. She added, "The ordination of our women is based upon the precedent whereby the Buddha himself singly ordained his own stepmother Mahāprajāpati and the 500 women of the Buddha's clan, who

all went forth when Mahāprajāpatī did and took her as their instructor.”⁵² But the Sri Lankans were too young and the ten needed for the ordination were lacking. While they were learning the language of Song from lay people who had resided in the West, a second group of nuns from Sri Lanka was summoned. This second group took up residence in Ding Lin Xia Si when they arrived in 432.⁵³

The following year, the nuns Hui Guo and Jing Yin requested the monk Gunavarman’s assistance. They were concerned that their monastic ordination was incomplete. In Hui Jiao’s account, Gunavarman responded, “The essence of Dharma ordination is through the great Saṅgha, which is the cause of loving the Way, so there is no obstacle to ordination if the full Saṅgha is not present.” The nuns, however, were also afraid that they had been too young for ordination and therefore wanted to receive the ordination again. Monk Gunavarman replied, “Marvelous! I will gladly assist those who wish to deepen their illumination!”⁵⁴

Now that there were a sufficient number of nuns to administer the monastic precepts, a site to hold the dual ordination ceremony was needed. The biographies of the nuns Bao Xian and Seng Guo locate the ordination at Nan Lin Si,⁵⁵ although it is unknown who was involved in the decision. Although Gunavarman undoubtedly helped prepare both the Sri Lankan and the Chinese women for the ceremony, his presence at the ceremony itself is uncertain. Hui Jiao’s biography of the monk implies that he had his conversation with Hui Guo in 431, which was the year of his passing.⁵⁶ Hui Jiao’s accounts of both Gunavarman and Saṅghavarman offer few citations for dating events, however, while Bao Chang was quite scrupulous in this regard. In Bao Chang’s account of Hui Guo, he unequivocally states that Gunavarman was present at the ceremony.⁵⁷

Nonetheless, it is highly likely that the ordination ceremony attracted imperial attention, if not full support. Emperor Wen sent not one, but two invitations to Gunavarman, who, after visiting Sri Lanka,⁵⁸ had stopped in Vietnam before continuing north to Jiankang.⁵⁹ There the palace endowed him well and he began by lecturing on *Fa Hua Jing* (*Lotus Sutra*) and *Shi Di Jing* (*Nagārjuna’s Commentary on the Ten Stages*). Again, imperial awareness, if not outright support, was highly likely. Although Gunavarman is well-known for bringing key Mahāyāna and Chan works to southern China, he was also active in translating several Vinaya works. These include *Za Abitan Xin Lun* (*Discourses on the Abhidharma*), *Si Fen Jiema Youpuosai Wu Jie Lue Lun* (*Dharmagupta Bhikṣuṇī Karman*), and *Youpuosai Ershisi Jie* (*The Twenty-Four Bodhisattva Vows*), all works critical to the Bhikṣuṇī Vinaya.⁶⁰

The dual ordination ceremony may have been the single most important development for the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha in China, but unfortunately, Bao Chang

gives conflicting dates for the event. In Hui Guo's biography, he gives the year as the 9th year of the Yuan Jia reign era of Emperor Song Wen, or 432.⁶¹ However, Bao Chang notes in his account of Seng Guo that Tessara and her ten nuns arrived in Jiankang in 433,⁶² thus supporting a later ordination date. Hui Jiao, in his account of Gunavarman, describes a conversation between the monk and the nuns Hui Guo and Jing Yin. Hui Guo is quoted as referring to the first group of nuns who had "arrived six years earlier," thus implying that the conversation had taken place no earlier than 435.⁶³ Bao Chang, however, in his biography of Hui Guo records that this conversation took place in the sixth year of the Yuan Jia reign era, or 429, which was the time the first group arrived in China. Because it was necessary to send for the second group of nuns, and because it would have taken years to train the Chinese and Sri Lankan nuns in preparation for the ceremony, and because of the size of the event and the complexity of planning, it is likely that the ceremony took place in 434.

The monk and Tripitaka master Saṅghavarman presided over the dual ordination of Hui Guo, her four disciples (Hui Yi, Hui Kai,⁶⁴ Seng Jing,⁶⁵ and Jing Yin⁶⁶), and 300 more nuns at Nan Lin Si.⁶⁷ Saṅghavarman was quite learned in the *Jie Pin* (*Elements of the Vinaya*). It is highly likely that the nun Hui Mu, who resided at Ju Ge Cun Si in Jiankang, also participated in the ceremony.⁶⁸ Only those who had previously been ordained by male members of the Saṅgha were allowed to receive the full ordination from both the male and female members of the Saṅgha. Saṅghavarman did this in order to increase the merit of what already had been done.⁶⁹ At that time the Saṅgha of monks and nuns was not complete and Saṅghavarman transformed it.⁷⁰ The faithful brought flowery brocades to the ceremony and only the seat where the monk sat was more brilliant.⁷¹

Gunavarman observed that the first transmission by monks was not invalid, but was incomplete.⁷² The monk Hui Yi challenged Saṅghavarman over Gunavarman's reasoning. Saṅghavarman argued that the event "clearly manifested the Dharma as revealed by the Saṅgha elders." Hui Yi accordingly acceded to the virtue of this argument and ordered the monk Hui Ji and his other disciples to give the nuns the respect and support that was their due.⁷³ Although Hui Yi had already asked Gunavarman to translate *Pusa Jie Di* (*The Stages of the Bodhisattva Precepts Sutra*) and *Pusa Di Chi Jing* (*Sutra on Upholding the Bodhisattva Stages*),⁷⁴ he may have been absent from the ceremony to register his disagreement. Unfortunately, Gunavarman, beloved by the nuns, passed into *nirvāṇa*. Permission was granted by the capital authorities to permit the unusual South Asian custom of cremation at Gunavarman's temple, Yi Huan Si, and throngs gathered around his funeral pyre. A white *stupa* was erected upon the spot and, according to Hui Jiao, the nuns who had participated in the dual ordination gathered here to weep without end.⁷⁵

Many women joined the Saṅgha as a consequence of the dual ordination ceremony. Whereas the *Biqiuni Zhuan* notes but a dozen biographies of nuns prior to the great ordination of 434, more than 50 followed. Emperor Wen was an enthusiastic supporter of the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha. The *Biqiuni Zhuan* cites him as the patron of the nuns Bao Xian,⁷⁶ Seng Nian,⁷⁷ and De Le.⁷⁸ He also asked the nun Jing Xian to give the Three Refuges to his son, the future emperor Ming, which put an end to the boy's nightmares.⁷⁹

Buddhism's expansion during the Song dynasty did not proceed completely unchecked. In 435, Emperor Wen posted an edict requiring all who wished to establish monasteries or cast images to first obtain official permission; otherwise the government authorities would seize the property and images.⁸⁰ The official Yi Su Mu of Danyang sent a memorial to the emperor, saying, "Buddhism has been received in China for four generations already. Monasteries numbering in the thousands have been constructed. Since Buddhism's arrival, emotional commitment has become superficial. There is no sincerity, competition for fame receives center place, while timber, bamboo, bronze, and brocade are wasted without limit. There is no reverence for the spirits of the land and no service to protect the country against invasion. [Followers] gad about without stopping. On this principle, all who seek to build temples or cast images should first obtain permission."⁸¹ The director of the Transcendental Academy, He Shang, who was also Prime Minister, challenged the official Yi's assertion, saying, "In villages of a hundred families, where there are ten upholding the five precepts, there will be ten who will be clean, pure, and reverent. In counties of a thousand households, where 100 observe the ten benevolent deeds, there will be 100 homes that are peaceful and well. With the spreading of this teaching to all in the universe, among the millions of folk, there will thus be millions more of compassionate people.... Thus if one can do one good deed, one bad deed is thus averted. By avoiding one evil deed, one punishment is not incurred. If punishments are avoided within a family, then ten thousand punishments are halted in the nation.... This, your majesty, is what is meant by 'Sitting until peace is achieved.'"⁸²

Although Emperor Wen is the first Chinese emperor to place controls on the establishment of Buddhist organizations in his country, he is also the first ever to query whether Buddhism could achieve the Confucian ideal of "bringing peace to the nation" (*zhi taiping*).⁸³ It must be emphasized here that Emperor Wen put restrictions on the establishment of Buddhist monasteries and the number in monastic orders, not for political, ideological or sectarian reasons, but to deal with fraudulent evasion of labor, tax, and military duties. How the Indian and Sri Lankan kings handled this problem would be another interesting topic for research.

The dual ordination ceremony of 434 helped to accomplish several things

in China. First and foremost, it ensured that the lineage of the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha was transmitted in an orthodox manner. The presence of women in monastic orders in China was fully accepted and their role as practitioners, translators, teachers, and meditation masters was solidly ensured. Equally important, the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha could thereby provide women with a publicly accepted means of acquiring literacy, access to social and political decision-making, and thus open the door to their development as intellectuals, leaders, and conscientious objectors. For the first time in Chinese history, women could now form groups, acquire position and skills, and do so independently of class, family, or wealth.

On a broader level, this event was the hallmark of a culture actively seeking to engage the world. This was an era where travel by men and women, domestic citizens as well as foreign nationals, was not only common, but also welcomed. Members of the Saṅgha, especially the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha provided spiritual guidance to the highest members of society, including the emperor and his family. While the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha as described in the accounts did not participate in the debate over whether monastics should *koutou* (perform three prostrations to the emperor, with nine bows of the head to the ground), *bhikṣuṇīs* did become involved in court life. *Bhikṣuṇīs* assisted emperors in resolving personal troubles and provided advice on political appointments and even military concerns. Through these actions, women entered broader circles of political life and *bhikṣuṇīs* provided roles of leadership and social action that heretofore were virtually nonexistent for women outside the imperial family.

A close review of events also shows that Jiankang (today Nanjing) was the end point of not one, but two Silk Routes – one by land and the other by sea. It was through this second route that Fa Xian made his epic return, and this was also the route that the ordination mentors and preceptor Gunavarman and Saṅghavarman chose to make their way to the Song Court. The sea provided a route by which the world's first diplomatic mission by women could be organized, facilitated, and accomplished.

One may argue that the development of the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha in China did not really begin to develop until the third century. The reasons for this two-century delay are not well-known, but may include the overall lack of literacy among women, their inability to hold official posts, and their lack of independent financial means with which to pursue travel and exchange goods and ideas. At the same time, while a few members of the Chinese Saṅgha did protest the ordination of women, foreign and Chinese members of the Saṅgha quickly dismissed their legalistic objections. Further, the *bhikṣuṇīs'* response to the concerns raised regarding the adequacy of their training was well addressed and argued, especially by Hui Guo.

While the Bhikṣu Saṅgha had already been established in China by the beginning of the third century, the dual ordination ceremony reinforced the

nuns' ability to pursue the monastic life. As An Ling Shou, who was one of China's earliest nuns, living in the first half of the fourth century, put it, "Neither blame nor praise moves me. Purity and uprightness are enough. Why must I follow my father, my husband, and my son to be considered a woman of propriety?"⁸⁴ The Saṅgha established by the Buddha liberated men from traditional roles as clan caretakers and defenders of status, property, and family. The Saṅgha liberated women from being valued only for their capacity to fulfil the mores, codes, and concerns of family and children. Thus, male and female members of the Saṅgha, both individually and collectively, became a new force in Chinese political, social, and economic life.

The 19 women from Sri Lanka who braved the sea and sailed 5,000 miles to a far and distant shore were mentored by the royal household of the Sri Lankan rulers. They were sent not because China was powerful, but because their leaders were virtuous. They were not sent to meet commoners or kindred spirits, but to meet the Chinese emperor himself. These women also helped to establish a new way of life, a way that would recognize the sovereignty of women to determine their own affairs, both spiritual and secular. Without understanding the contributions of women, we cannot fully understand the Saṅgha, and without understanding the Saṅgha, we cannot fully understand what the Buddha taught.

APPENDIX: The First Nuns' Monasteries of China

<u>Monastery</u>	<u>Year Founded/ First Key Event</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Notes/Sources</u>

Nuns' Monasteries in the Jiankang Area

Jian Fu Si.	344	Jiankang	

The nuns Hui Kan, Kan Ming Gan, and Hui Zhan move here in the second year of the Yong He reign era (344). This is a year before the death of their sponsor, the Minister of Public Works, He Chong. See Bao Chang, Biquini Zhuan (BZ), "Kangmingganni Zhuan" and "Huizhanni Zhuan."

Yan Xing Si	344	Jiankang	

The same year, Empress Chu builds this women's monastery for the nun Seng Ji, who came to have over 100 disciples. BZ, "Sengjini Zhuan."

- Yong An Si 354 Jiankang
Also known as Bei Yong An Si and Hehou Si. Xing Yun, *Fojiao Shi Nianbiao (A Chronology of Chinese Buddhist History)* (Gaoxiong, Taiwan: Buddhist Publications Society, 1987), p. 27.
- Wa Guan Si 364 Jinling
Wa Guan Si is not necessarily a women's monastery, but is prominent in the lives of many of the nuns. Xing Yun, p. 28.
- Dong An Si 365 Jiankang BZ, "Huichi Zhuan."
- Wu Jiang Si 371-373 SW of Jiankang
The nun Dao Rong resides here. BZ, "Daorongni Zhuan."
- Xin Lin Si 371-373 Jiankang
Also known as Pu Ti Si. Hai Fa, *Bai Ma Si yu Zhongguo Fojiao (White Horse Temple and the History of Chinese Buddhism)* (Chengdu: Sichuan Works Publishing House, 1996), p. 152.
- Xuan Tai Si c. 383 Wujiang, near Jiankang
Faxiang enters this temple at about this time. BZ, "Faxiangni Zhuan."
- Jian Jing Si 385 Jiankang
In the tenth year of the Tai Yuan reign era of Emperor Jin Xiao Wu, the Grand Tutor (and brother to the Emperor) Dao Zi founds Jian Jing Si for the nun Zhi Miao Yin and appoints her director over more than 100 disciples. BZ, "Zhimiaoyinni Zhuan."
- Zhu Lin Si 5th c. Dongxiangcun
The nun Jing Cheng practices here. BZ, "Jingchengni Zhuan."
- Niu Mu Si 5th c. Jiangling
The nun Hui Yu, a native of Chang An, travels south to the territory of Qing and Chu and takes up residence here. BZ, "Huiyuni Zhuan."
- Ju Ge Cun Si 5th c. Lian Commandary w. of Jiankang
The nun Hui Mu goes forth at the age of 11, receives the ten precepts, and comes under the instruction of the nun Hui Chao here. BZ, "Huimuni Zhuan."
- Tai Xuan Tai Si c. 400 Wu Commandary
The nun Xuan Cao decides to go forth and enters this temple. BZ, "Xuancaoni Zhuan."
- Xi Si 402 Jiankang
The mother of Seng Jing, while still pregnant, seeks the advice of the monk Seng Zhao of Wa Guan Si and the nun Tan Zhi of Xi Si. BZ, "Sengjingni Zhuan."

Jian An Si 402 Near Jiankang

The mother of Seng Jing, with the advice of the monk Seng Zhao of Wa Guan Si and the nun Tan Zhi of Xi Si, pledges her daughter as a disciple of the nun Bai of Jian An Si. *BZ*, “Sengjingni Zhuan.”

Zhu Yuan Si 416-465 Jiankang

The nun Hui Jun uses gifts of clothing and medicine from the Jiangxia prince, chief minister of the Song state, and fifth son of Emperor Song Xiao Wu, to establish this temple. *BZ*, “Huijunni Zhuan.”

Qing Yuan Si 419-420 Jiankang

Emperor Jin Gong’s Empress, Madame Zhe, founds Qing Yuan Si. Hai Fa, p. 153.

Zhi Xuan Si 420 Jiankang

The nun Dao Shou takes up residence here in 425. *BZ*, “Daoshouni Zhuan.”

Pu Xian Si c. 421 Jiankang

Also known as Samantabhadra Monastery. The nun Jing Hui becomes a resident here. *BZ*, “Jinghuini Zhuan.”

Jing Fu Si 422 Jiankang

This temple receives the first group of Sri Lankans in 429. *BZ*, “Sengguoni Zhuan.”

Nan Lin Si 424-453 Jiankang

Emperor Song Wen gives the nun Bao Xian clothing and food, and provides for the needs of the nun Seng Nian, both associated with this temple. *BZ*, “Baoksianni Zhuan” and “Sengnianni Zhuan.”

Nan Si 424-453 Wu County southeast of Jiankang

Either during or prior to the Yuan Jian reign Era of Emperor Song Wen, the nun Fa Sheng takes up residence here. *BZ*, “Fashengni Zhuan.”

Wang Guo Si c. 430 Jiankang

Song Yi Kang, the prince of Pengcheng and Grand General, builds this temple for the monk Gunavarman, who arrives in China in the 7th year of the Yuan Jia reign era of Emperor Song Wen. Grand General Song Yi Kang also invites the nun De Le to reside there. *BZ*, “Deleni Zhuan” and “Jingxiuni Zhuan.”

Peng Cheng Si 431 Jiankang

In the eighth year of the Yuan Jia reign era of Emperor Song Wen, the nun Dao Qiong has several images of the Buddha cast. Two golden images with a curtained dais are installed here. *BZ*, “Daoqiongni Zhuan.”

Nan Jian Xing Si 431 Jiankang

In the eighth year of the Yuan Jia reign era of Emperor Song Wen, the nun Dao Qiong has several images of the Buddha cast. Two golden ones with banners, canopies and various articles are installed here. *BZ*, “Daoqiongni Zhuan.”

Ding Lin Xia Si 433 Jiankang

Captain Nanti brings the second group of 11 Sri Lankan nuns, including Tessara. Hui Jiao, *Gao Seng Zhuan (Lives of Eminent Monks)*, *Taisho Shinshu Daizokyo*, Vol. 50, No. 2085, circa 530, “Sengjiabama Zhuan.”

Pu Ti Si c. 438 Guangling (Yangzhou)

The nun Shi Hui Qiong founds this temple. Because it is so beautiful, she donates it to the monk Hui Zhi and moves into Nan Yong An Si. *BZ*, “Shihuiqiongni Zhuan.”

Nan Yong An Si 441 Guangling

In the 18th year of the Yuan Jia reign era of Emperor Song Wen, Madame Wang donates land for this temple to the nun Shi Hui Qiong. Madame Wang was the mother of Prince Lang of Jiangxia, who was the fifth son of Emperor Song Wu, the founder of the Song Dynasty. *BZ*, “Shiqiongni Zhuan.”

Chan Lin Si 444 Song

During the 21st year of the Yuan Jia reign era of Emperor Song Wen, the nun Hui Sheng goes forth at the age of 18 and after full monastic ordination becomes a disciple of the nun Jing Xiu of Chan Lin Si. *BZ*, “Huishengni Zhuan.”

Nan An Si 447 Zhejiang

In the 24th year of the Yuan Jia reign era, the nun Hui Qiong wishes to have her body cut up and exposed as an offering to sentient beings. In the end, her wish is not fulfilled and she is buried with a tablet to mark her passing. *BZ*, “Huiqiongni Zhuan.”

Gao Zuo Si 447 Jiankang? Yangzhou?

When her disciple, the nun Hui Lang, learns what has happened, she hurries to the site, claims Hui Qiong’s body, and has it interred in the cliff in front of Gao Zuo Si. A pagoda is later built here in Hui Qiong’s memory. *BZ*, “Shiqiongni Zhuan.”

Le An Si c. 450 Jiankang

The year after her parents take her to the capital, Hui Hui’s parents give her permission to go forth and she joins this monastery. *BZ*, “Huihuini Zhuan” and Tsai, p. 103.

Zong Yun Si 454 Jiankang?

When she is about 21 years old (assuming that she passed into nirvāna when she was 65), the nun Zhao Ming goes forth when her family takes up residence here. *BZ*, “Zhaomingni Zhuan.”

Qi Ming Si c. 460 Qiantang Jiangsu P
After studying under the monk Hui Ji at Tu Shan Si, the nun Jiangsu P. Zhao Ming returns to Qiantang to reside here. *BZ*, “Zhaomingni Zhuan.”

San Ceng Si 463 Jiangling Jiangsu P.
The nun Dao Zong comes from an unknown family and takes up residence here. *BZ*, “Daozongni Zhuan”

Xi Qing Yuan Si c. 463 Jiankang
Based on the assumption that she has reached the age of 20, the nun Miao Wei goes forth and takes up residence here. *BZ*, “Miaoweini Zhuan.”

Yong Fu Si 465 Jiankang
Emperor Song Ming appoints the nun Fa Jing to live in Pu Xian Si, transferring her from this temple. *BZ*, “Fajingni Zhuan.”

Zong Sheng Si 465-472 Danyang Jiangsu P.
Emperor Song Ming invites the nun Seng Jing to return from Lingnan in Guang Province to the capital for a personal meeting at the palace. Upon her arrival in the capital, by imperial decree, she lives in Zong Sheng Si. *BZ*, “Sengjingni Zhuan.”

Dong Qing Yuan Si 467 Jiankang
During the 3rd year of the Tai Shi Reign Era of Emperor Song Ming, the Saṅgha of Qing Yuan Si discusses dividing into two communities because they have outgrown their present quarters. The nun Bao Ying builds a pagoda on the east side of the monastery and the Saṅgha thus resolves to establish Dong (East) Qing Yuan Si. *BZ*, “Faquanni Zhuan.”

Miao Xiang Ni Si 473 Jiankang
During the first year of the Yuan Hui reign era of Emperor Song Hou Fei, the northern barbarians invade, forcing the nun Seng Gai and her disciple Fa Jin to flee south from Hua Lin Si to Jiankang and take up residence at Miao Xiang Ni Si. *BZ*, “Senggaini Zhuan.”

Nan Jin Ling Si 473-477 Jiankang
Emperor Song Hou Fei decrees that the nun Ling Yu will serve as director of Nan Jin Ling Si. *BZ*, “Lingyuni Zhuan.”

Pu Xing Si c. 474 Jiankang?
The monk Fa Ying, a master of the monastic regulations, delivers a lecture on the *Shi Song Lu* (*Sarvāstivāda Monastic Regulations in Ten Recitations*) here. Upon hearing him, ten or so nuns seek to be reordained. The nun Bao Xian, who had established the Office of Monastic Affairs, issues an order stating that all nuns who have not attended a dual ordination ceremony should come forward and be

ordained. Those who are not yet of sufficient age are asked to make a public confession before the assembly. Only upon successful investigation by the Office of Monastic Affairs are candidates deemed suitable to be reordained. Those who are not suitable are to be expelled from the Saṅgha. Under the nun Bao Xian's leadership, quarrels end and the matter is put to rest. *BZ*, "Baoksianni Zhuan."

Xian Ju Si 474 Jiankang?

In the ninth month, this temple is founded by the nun Seng Shu when she is 44 years old. *BZ*, "Sengshuni Zhuan."

Fu Tian Si 479-490 Jiankang

Sometime during these years, the prince of Yuzhang, who is the second son of the Emperor Gao and founder of the Qi Dynasty,²⁷⁵ builds this temple for the nun Hui Xu. *BZ*, "Huixuni Zhuan"

Fa Yin Si 482 Jiankang

In the fourth year of the Jian Yuan Reign Era of Emperor Qi Gao, the nun Tan Jian establishes this temple. *BZ*, "Tanjianni Zhuan."

Qi Ming Si 483 Yanguan County Jiangsu P.

During the fourth year of the Jian Yuan reign era of Emperor Qi Gao, the nun Seng Meng returns from Jian Fu Si to her hometown in Yanguan County (east of the capital) to visit her sick mother. She converts her home into a monastery, Qi Ming Si. *BZ*, "Sengmengni Zhuan."

Ding Shan Si 483-494 Guilin Park Near Jiankang

Xiao Zi Liang, the prince of Jingling, has this temple built for the nun Dao Gui. He wants to appoint her abbess, but she only accepts the position of meditation master. *BZ*, "Daoguini Zhuan."

She Shan Si 483-493 Jiankang?

The nun Zhi Sheng sacrifices her robes and begging bowl, selling them to raise money for making stone images for the sake of the seven emperors of Song and Qi at this temple. *BZ*, "Zhishengni Zhuan."

Hua Yin Si 483-493 Jiankang

When the meditation hall is first built, Emperor Qi Wu appoints the nun Miao Zhi to lecture on the *Sheng Man Jing* (*Shrimala Sutra*) and *Jing Ming Jing* (*Vimalakirti Sutra*) and personally attends many of her lectures. *BZ*, "Miaozhini Zhuan."

Chan Ji Si 483-493 Jiankang?

During the Yong Ming reign era of Emperor Qi Wu, the nun Seng Gai moves from Miao Xiang Ni Si to Chan Ji Si. She wants to propagate Chan, but ironically, the number of monks and laypeople who came to visit her make this nearly impossible. She therefore expands the monastery so that she can have a quiet cell of her own. *BZ*, "Senggaini Zhuan."

Bai Shan Si 483-493 Jiankang area?

During the reign of Emperor Qi Wu, the nun Tan Jian offers her own monastery, Fa Yin Si, for the monk Hui Ming to live in. The nun Tan Jian then goes to live at Bai Shan Si, where she goes on alms rounds. *BZ*, “Tanjianni Zhuan.”

Zhong Shan c. 485 Zhongshan

The Jingling prince, who is the second son of Emperor Qi Qu, establishes Bell Mountain, a cemetery for those of renowned virtue. *BZ*, “Miaozhini Zhuan.” Many of China’s most prominent monks and nuns are buried here.

Ji Shan Si 492 Jiankang

The Emperor founds this temple and installs the nuns of Fu Tian Si here. The foreign monk Arya, known for spells and chanting, is also installed there. The nun Hui Xu also moves there. *BZ*, “Huixuni Zhuan.”

Ding Lin Si 495 Zhongshan Jiangsu P.

The nun Miao Zhi passes into *nirvāna* at the age of 64 during the second year of the Jian Wu reign era of Emperor Qi Wu and is buried here. *BZ*, “Miaozhini Zhuan.”

Zhao Ming Si c. 493 Shanyin

The nun Fa Xuan moves from Qing Yuan Si to Zhao Ming Si. *BZ*, “Faxuanni Zhuan.”

Nuns’ Monasteries in the South

Bao Bu Yuan 270-400 Fenghua, Zhejiang P.

This temple is founded during the Jin originally as a women’s monastery. It was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution and is now partially renovated. Wang, Chong Pan, *Zhongguo Ming Si Zhidian (A Dictionary of the Famous Temples of China)* (Beijing: China Travel Press, 1991), pp. 481-82.

NA 432 Dongguan, Cengcheng

During the ninth year of the Yuan Jia reign era of Emperor Song Wen, the nun Fa Yuan and her sister are associated with this temple. *BZ*, “Fayuanni Zhuan.”

Zhong Zao Si 435-465 Chaoting/Panyu, Guangdong P.

The nun Seng Jing, awakened to the truth of impermanence, wants to go on pilgrimage to the places where the Buddha lived, but is held back by both monastics and laity from such a venture. She accepts their decision. Her manner changes the hearts of the “barbarian” peoples around her and 13 families donate land and built her this monastery by the Multitude Temple. *BZ*, “Sengjingni Zhuan.”

Zhao Ming She 453 Guiji Zhejiang P.

At the death of Emperor Song Wen, the nun De Le moves from Qing Yuan Si in the capital to this temple. She is an excellent teacher and students surround her like clouds. She helps Buddhism flourish in the southeast. BZ, “Deleni Zhuan.”

Nuns’ Monasteries in the North

Zhu Lin Si? 313-317 Luoyang

Jing Jian becomes a ten-precept nun, receiving her vows from the foreign monk and *dhyāna* master Fashi. She becomes the director for 24 more nuns. Along with the nun Xing Zhong and three other women, she is ordained by the monk Tanmojieduo, who uses a copy of the *Nun’s Precepts* brought in by Buddhasingha. This takes place on the eighth day of the second month, the anniversary of the Buddha’s *nirvāna*. BZ, “Jingjianni Zhuan.”

Jian Xian Si 318-348 Yecheng

After receiving the ten precepts from the monk Buddhasingha, along with the nun Jing Jiang, An Ling Shou establishes this nun’s monastery in the Latter Zhao capital. These dates are chosen to follow after the nun Jing Jian receives the ten precepts from the monk Zhishan and before the passing of Buddhasingha. BZ, “Anlingshouni Zhuan.”

Bei Yue Si 340’s Hongnong/ W. of Luoyang
Miao Xiang becomes a nun here. BZ, “Miaoxiangni Zhuan.”

Dong Si c. 350 Luoyang

The nun Zhu Dao Xiang lectures on the *Fa Hua* (*Flower of the Law Sutra*), *Xiao Pin* (*Smaller Perfection of Wisdom*), and other sutras here. She initiates the chanting of the Bhikṣuṇī Vinaya. BZ, “Zhudaoxiangni Zhuan.”

Ceremonial Dais c. 357 Luoyang

The foreign monk Tanmojieduo sets up an ordination dais and ordains the nun Jing Jian and four disciples using the newly translated texts. BZ, “Jingjianni Zhuan.”

Ci Zhou Xi Si After 357 Northern Jin

Emperor Fu Jian (who ascends to the throne in 357) reveres the nun Zhi Xian, who moves to this temple later in life. BZ, “Zhixianni Zhuan”

Ci Zhou Si Late 300s Shandong Province?

The nun Ling Zong enters *nirvāna* at the age of 75 at this temple. She was known for calling on Guanyin and Amitābha. Emperor Jian Xiao Wu, who reigned from 376-397, reveres her. BZ, “Lingzongni Zhuan.”

Hua Lin Si c. 445 Pengcheng
While still young, aged 15 or so, the nun Seng Gai goes forth and becomes a disciple of the nun Seng Zhi at this temple. *BZ*, “Senggaini Zhuan.”

Yao Guang Si c. 490 Luoyang
Empress Dowager Feng and the Empress Consort of Emperor Xiao Ming go forth and are ordained as nuns here. Hong Sheng Cai, *Nigu Tan (Speaking of Nuns)* (Guangzhou, China: Zhongshan University Press, 1996), p. 6.

San Ceng Si 449 Jiangling, Hubei/Honan/Shanxi
Hui Xu leaves home at the age of 18 and enters San Ceng Si in the province of Qing. *BZ*, “Huixu Zhuan.”

NA 473-476 Northern Wei
There are 6,478 monasteries and 77,350 monks and nuns located throughout the area of Wei. Xing Yun, p. 48.

NA 486 Northern Wei
That winter, the Northern Wei forcibly laicizes 1,327 monks and nuns (Xing Yun, p. 50). In the tenth year of the Tai He reign era, there are 100 monasteries in the capital of Pingcheng, housing over 2,000 monks and nuns. Hai Fai, pp. 275-76.

Longmen 500 Luoyang Yangdong Caves
The Northern Wei Empress Gao Zu Wen Shao has the first two caves of this great complex opened up and two Buddha images created. Xing Yun, p.53.

Zhu Yuan Jing She 501 Yan
A nun named Seng Mao, surnamed Wang of Pengcheng, was a strict vegetarian and ascetic. Whatever was given to her was bequeathed to Zhu Yuan Jing She. *BZ*, “Deleni Zhuan.”

Nun's Monasteries in the Southwest

Chang Le Si 442-504 Chengdu
After many years of travelling, the nun Tan Hui insists on returning to her native place, Chengdu (and presumably to Chang Le Si with which she is associated) to take care of her ailing mother. To the northwest of the town's bridge, she has a pagoda and temple built. Soon after that, she founds three more monasteries. *BZ*, “Tanhuini Zhuan.”

Yong Kang Si c. 470–472 Shu (Sichuan)

Towards the end of the Tai Shi reign era of Emperor Song Ming, the nun Hui Yao, who went forth as a child, burns herself to death to fulfill a life-long intention of making herself “a worship offering to the Three Jewels.” *BZ*, “Huiyaoni Zhuan.”

? c. 437 Shu

For four to five years the nun Shan Miao lives in retreat here with her younger sister, then burns herself to death. *BZ*, “Shanmiaoni Zhuan”

Nun's Monasteries in the Far West

Lang Zhong Si 439 Gaochang

At the age of 30, Feng goes forth and becomes a nun here. She is known for chanting, and reciting the entire *Great Final Nirvāna Sūtra* in only three days. *BZ*, “Fengni Zhuan.”

NOTES

1. Senarat Wijayasundara, “Restoring the Order of Nuns to the Theravādin Tradition,” in Karma Lekshe Tsomo, *Buddhist Women Across Cultures: Realizations* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999).
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24. Chen Zhi Ping, *Zhonghua Tongshi* (*A History of China*), Vol. 3 (Taipei: Liming Wenhua Publishing House, 1975), p. 17.
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27. Ibid, p. 153.
28. *Fojiao Shi Nianbiao*, p. 38 and *Bai Ma Si yu Zhongguo Fojiao*, p. 227.
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30. *Biqiuni Zhuan*, “Yeshouni Zhuan,” p. 940b.
31. For the names and locations of women’s monasteries prior to 500, please see the attached glossary.
32. The monk Hui Yi was invited by Fan Tai to reside at Zhi Xuan Si. See *Fo Jian Shi Nianbiao*, p. 38. The Emperor Wen Song personally attended the Leaving Home Ceremony of the monk Hui Ji at this temple in either 426 or 429. Ibid., p. 39.
33. *Biqiuni Zhuan*, “Yeshouni Zhuan,” p. 940b.
34. Ibid., “Sengjingni Zhuan,” p. 942a.
35. Ibid., “Sengjingni Zhuan,” p. 942b.
36. Ibid., “Baixianni Zhuan,” p. 941a.
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41. *Biqiuni Zhuan*, “Baixianni Zhuan,” p. 941a.

42. Ibid., “Huiguoni Zhuan,” p. 937c.
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61. *Biqiuni Zhuan*, “Huiguoni Zhuan,” p. 937c.
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83. *Bai Ma Si yu Zhongguo Fojiao*, p. 228.
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Lineage and Transmission: Integrating the Chinese and Tibetan Orders of Buddhist Nuns

Heng-Ching Shih

The assembly of disciples in Buddhism is four-fold: *bhikṣu* and *bhikṣuṇī* (fully ordained men and women), and *upāsakas* and *upāsikā* (laymen and laywomen). In Tibetan Buddhism, however, the *bhikṣuṇī* assembly is non-existent. As Tibetan Buddhism becomes more and more popular in the world, it faces more and more criticism due to this lack of a *bhikṣuṇī* order.

Since the Chinese communists unintentionally “opened” Tibet’s doors to the Western world, Tibetan Buddhism has become more and more popular in the international community. As a result, the Tibetan tradition has attracted quite a few western women to join the Buddhist Saṅgha. Historically, however, there has never had an official Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha in Tibetan Buddhism. The lack of a Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha in Tibet has led some Buddhist scholars to argue both that Tibet is not a “central” land of the Dharma and that Tibetan Buddhism harbors sexual discrimination.

In recent years, Tibetan Buddhism in the West has faced more and more pressure from its Western followers in general, and Western nuns and female devotees in particular, to establish a *bhikṣuṇī* lineage. The Dalai Lama, who has been very open-minded concerning this issue, has assigned Tibetan monks familiar with Vinaya to do research on various Vinaya traditions and the *bhikṣuṇī* lineage in Chinese Buddhism in order to investigate the possibility of establishing a Tibetan *bhikṣuṇī* lineage. Recently two seminars, in Taiwan and Dharamsala, were organized to discuss the *bhikṣuṇī* ordination and the possible

establishment of a Tibetan *bhikṣuṇī* lineage.¹ At these conferences, Vinaya masters from various Buddhist traditions gathered together to consider the issues that the Tibetan tradition is most concerned with, namely, the validity and continuity of the Chinese *bhikṣuṇī* lineage, the procedures of the *bhikṣuṇī* ordination, the differences between Dharmagupta and Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinayas, and the procedures to be followed if a Tibetan Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha is to be established.

In response to these developments, this paper deals with issues concerning the *bhikṣuṇī* ordination in different Vinaya traditions, especially the Chinese lineage of *bhikṣuṇī* ordination, and how a Tibetan *bhikṣuṇī* lineage can be established. The paper is organized into three sections. The first section compares *bhikṣuṇī* ordination in different Vinaya traditions, including the Dharmagupta, Mūlasarvāstivāda, Theravāda, Mahāsaṅghika, etc. It describes the early ordination tradition according to the textual record to determine what constitutes correct ordination for *bhikṣuṇī*. The second section discusses how the Chinese *bhikṣuṇī* order was established, the procedures of the ordination, and the validity of the Chinese *bhikṣuṇī* lineage. It examines the historical record in the Chinese tradition to show that a genuine *bhikṣuṇī* ordination was established in China and has been continuously maintained to the present. This finding is important since there have been recent claims to the contrary. The third section deals with the issues concerning the establishment of a Tibetan *bhikṣuṇī* order, including differences between the *prātimokṣa* of the Dharmagupta and Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinayas, the single and dual ordinations, and the possibility of combining two different Vinaya lineages. It compares the Dharmagupta Vinaya followed by the Chinese Saṅgha and the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya followed by the Tibetan Saṅgha and finds that the difference are not so great as to prevent members of the Tibetan nuns' community from receiving ordination from the Chinese Saṅgha. Based on the discussion and findings in the first three sections, section four makes suggestions for the possible establishment of a Tibetan Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha.

Procedures of Bhikṣuṇī Ordination

It is a well-known fact that the first Buddhist nun was Mahāprajāpatī, the aunt and stepmother of the Buddha.² It was recorded that one time, when the Buddha was staying at Kapilavastu, Mahāprajāpatī, together with 500 Śākya women came to ask for the Buddha's permission to renounce the world and "go forth from home into homelessness in the Dhamma and discipline proclaimed by the Truth-finder."³ They were refused three times by the Buddha. Finally, on behalf of the women, Ānanda asked the Buddha whether a woman, having left the household life and taken ordination, could realize the fruit of *arhat*ship. The Buddha responded

positively to the question, but conditionally, requiring the women to follow the “eight chief rules” (*gurudharmas*) before allowing them to be ordained.

The eight chief rules vary slightly in different Vinaya texts. According to the Dharmagupta Vinaya, the eight rules are: (1) A *bhikṣuṇī*, even if she has been ordained for one hundred years, should bow down before even a newly ordained *bhikṣu*; (2) A *bhikṣuṇī* is not to revile or abuse a *bhikṣu*; (3) A *bhikṣuṇī* should not admonish a *bhikṣu* whereas a *bhikṣu* can admonish a *bhikṣuṇī*; (4) A *bhikṣuṇī* should receive the *upasampadā* (full ordination) from both Bhikṣu and Bhikṣuṇī Saṅghas after two years of studying the precepts; (5) A *bhikṣuṇī* who has committed a serious offence should undergo the *mānatta*⁴ discipline before both Bhikṣu and Bhikṣuṇī Saṅghas; (6) Every half month the *bhikṣuṇīs* should ask the Bhikṣu Saṅgha to give exhortation; (7) A *bhikṣuṇī* should not spend the rainy season in a district where there is no *bhikṣu*; and (8) After the rainy season, the *bhikṣuṇīs* should hold the ceremony of repentance of their offences (*pravāraṇā*) before both the Bhikṣu and Bhikṣuṇī Saṅghas.⁵

The practice of these eight rules is thought to be necessary condition for any woman wishing to become a Buddhist nun and a way of governing the relationship between the Bhikṣu and Bhikṣuṇī Saṅghas.⁶ The fourth rule specifies that the *upasampadā* (full *bhikṣuṇī* ordination) has to be confirmed by the Bhikṣu Saṅgha. Although it appears that the final authority of the full ordination lies with the Bhikṣu and Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha, the supervision of the whole process of a woman’s ordination, beginning with the *pravrajyā* ordination, leading to the *śikṣamāṇā* ordination (for two years’ study of the six *dharma*s) and culminating in the *upasampadā* ordination (except the final step), lies with the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅghas. In other words, the Buddha gave the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅghas the right and full responsibility to train its novices. The following are the steps and procedures for becoming a *bhikṣuṇī*.

Any woman who resolves to become a *bhikṣuṇī* needs to go through three ordinations: *śrāmaṇerikā*s, *śikṣamāṇā*, and *bhikṣuṇī*. The *bhikṣuṇī* ordination procedure includes two separate ordinations from the Bhikṣu and Bhikṣuṇī Saṅghas, which is usually called a “dual ordination.”

The Śrāmaṇerika Ordination

The first step in the ordination process for women is to ask permission to leave the household life and to request *pravrajyā* ordination from the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha. Before doing this, a laywoman has to obtain the consent of both parents. One of the questions posed to the candidate for ordination at the *pravrajyā* and *upādhyāyika* ceremonies is, “Have your parents given their consent?”⁷ A married woman must obtain the consent of her husband before she can be ordained.⁸

After the woman gets permission from her parents or husband, the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha is also required to give its permission. The preceptor *bhikṣuṇī* (*karmakārikā*), who asks for permission from the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅghas, says, “May the Noble Saṅgha listen! The girl So-and-so desires to receive the *pravrajyā* ordination from the *upādhyāyika* So-and-so. Now is the proper time for the Saṅgha to grant her the *pravrajyā* ordination.”⁹ This request ought to be repeated once more. After the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅghas gives its consent by remaining silent, the *upādhyāyika* master then shaves her head and confers the *pravrajyā* ordination.

After taking the *pravrajyā* ordination, the woman may take the ten precepts from her *upādhyāyika* and becomes a *śrāmaṇerikā*. According to the Dharmagupta Vinaya, a *śrāmaṇerikā* must: (1) be at least twelve years of age, or old enough to be able “to chase crows”;¹⁰ (2) keep the ten precepts of a *śrāmaṇerikā*; and (3) eat only one meal a day.¹¹

The Śikṣamāṇā Ordination

A *śrāmaṇerikā* who is at least 18 years old may take the *śikṣamāṇā* ordination with her *upādhyāyika* before the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha. She then lives as a *śikṣamāṇā* for a two-year period. There are two reasons for the requirement of two years of *śikṣamāṇā* training: (1) to ascertain that she is mature enough to become a *bhikṣuṇī*, and (2) to ensure that she is not pregnant. According to the Dharmagupta Vinaya, the reason for the two-year training is that after joining the Saṅgha, some young women did not know the precepts and therefore misbehaved. The Buddha therefore made the two-year training a requirement prior to the *upasampadā* ordination.¹²

The Daśabhāṇavāra Vinaya (*Shisong lu*) gives another reason. At one time some *bhikṣuṇīs* unknowingly ordained a pregnant woman. Later, when they found out about her pregnancy, they accused her of sexual misconduct and wanted to expel her from the Saṅgha. She defended herself by explaining that she was pregnant before she became ordained. The *bhikṣuṇīs* reported this to the Buddha, who proclaimed, “From this day hence, a *śrāmaṇerikā* ought to study the six *dharmas* (six precepts) for two years to determine whether or not she is pregnant.”¹³

Only women 18 and older are to be given *śrāmaṇerikā* ordination, but there is one exception: a girl who is ten years old and has been married is allowed to take *śrāmaṇerikā* ordination. There are four rules concerning the *śrāmaṇerikā* ordination in the Dharmagupta Vinaya: (1) If a *bhikṣuṇī* does not give the *śrāmaṇerikā* precepts to a woman who is over 18, or the full precepts to a woman who is over twenty, she commits a *pāyantika*; (2) If a *bhikṣuṇī* gives the two-year training in the precepts to a woman over 18 but does not give her

the six precepts, then when she is 20 years old gives her the full precepts, she commits a *pāyantika*; (3) If a ten-year-old girl who has been married has had two years of training in the precepts, a *bhikṣuṇī* can give her the full ordination when she is twelve years old. If she gives her the precepts when she is younger than twelve, she commits a *pāyantika*; (4) If a *bhikṣuṇī* ordains many disciples, yet does not teach them for two years nor provide them with two things (i.e., Dharma and the requisites), she commits a *pāyantika*.¹⁴

In addition to the ten precepts of the *śrāmaṇerikā*, a *śikṣamāṇā* must observe six *dharma*s. However, the six *śikṣamāṇā* precepts given in the various Vinaya texts do not agree.¹⁵ In Dharmagupta Vinaya the six *dharma*s are to abstain from: (1) unchastity and from touching a man, (2) stealing, (3) killing, (4) false speech, (5) eating at improper times, and (6) intoxicants.¹⁶ The Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya gives six *dharma*s and six *anudharma* (incidental *dharma*s). The six *dharma*s are to abstain from: (1) going along a road alone; (2) crossing a river alone; (3) touching a man's body; (4) sleeping in the same room with a man; (5) acting as a go-between for marriage arrangements; (6) concealing a *bhikṣuṇī*'s *pārājika* offense. The six *anudharma*s are to abstain from: (1) touching silver or gold (2) cutting the pubic hair; (3) digging in the ground; (4) cutting trees or grass; (5) eating food that was not received from another; (6) eating leftover food.¹⁷

Regardless of the number of *śikṣamāṇā* precepts there are, the purpose is to train in the observance of the precepts strictly and to prepare the *śikṣamāṇā*s for *bhikṣuṇī* ordination. The Dharmagupta Vinaya specifies that in case of any violation of the *śikṣamāṇā* precepts, the precepts must be retaken and the *śikṣamāṇā* has to begin the two-year training all over again.

Before a *śrāmaṇerikā* may take a *śikṣamāṇā* ordination, the *Bhikṣuṇī* Saṅgha must give its permission. The procedure for *śikṣamāṇā* ordination involves the candidate, her *upādhyāyika*, and the *Bhikṣuṇī* Saṅgha. First, the *śrāmaṇerikā* herself requests permission from the *Bhikṣuṇī* Saṅgha by saying, "May the Noble Saṅgha listen! This *śrāmaṇerikā* So-and-so is requesting the two-year study of the *śikṣamāṇā* precepts. My *upādhyāyika* is So-and-so. May the Saṅgha, out of compassion, grant me the two-year study of the precepts."¹⁸

After she repeats this request three times, the *bhikṣuṇī* karma master recites the "one statement and four karmas" on her behalf.¹⁹ This procedure consists of stating the motion once, asking for agreement three times, and stating the decision. The *karma* master introduces the four-fold *karma* with this motion: "May the Noble Saṅgha of *bhikṣuṇī* listen! This *śrāmaṇerikā*, So-and-so, has asked the Saṅgha for the two-year study of the precepts. Her *upādhyāyika* is So-and-so. Now is the proper time for the Saṅgha to grant her the two-year study of the precepts. This is the motion."²⁰

After making this statement, the *karma* master *bhikṣuṇī* begins the first *karma*: “May the Noble Saṅgha of *bhikṣuṇīs* listen! This *śrāmaṇerikā* So-and-so has asked the Saṅgha for the two-year study of the [*sīkam*] precepts. Her *upādhyāyika* is So-and-so. The Saṅgha is to grant her the two-year study of the precepts. If you sanction [this *karma*], please remain silent. If you do not sanction [this *karma*], please voice your objection.”²¹

The second and third *karmas* follow the same general format. If there is no objection, the *karma* master announces the Saṅgha decision of assent. The *upādhyāyika* then states the *sikṣamāṇā* precepts one by one and asks the *śrāmaṇerikā* if she will be able to keep them. After the *śrāmaṇerikā* answers in the affirmative to each precept, the *sikṣamāṇā* ordination ceremony is complete.

Full Bhikṣuṇī Ordination (Upasampadā)

After a *sikṣamāṇā* has completed the two-year training and is 20 years old, she is eligible to take the *upasampadā* ordination to become a *bhikṣuṇī*. First, the *sikṣamāṇā* should go to a qualified *bhikṣuṇī* and request that she become her preceptor (*upādhyāyika*). To do this, she says: “I, So-and-so, request your reverence to become my preceptor. By following your reverence, I will be able to receive the *upasampadā* ordination.”²² After this request has been repeated three times, the *upādhyāyika* replies, “Your request is granted.” Then two other precept masters are chosen: the *karmakārikā bhikṣuṇī* and the instructor *bhikṣuṇī*. According to the Dharmagupta Vinaya, in addition to the three preceptors, another seven “witness *bhikṣuṇī* masters” should be present at the *upasampadā* ceremony.²³ The *karmakārikā* is responsible for carrying out the *karmas*, while the instructor *bhikṣuṇī* is responsible for determining whether she is qualified to receive the *upasampadā* ordination. She instructs the candidate and asks her various questions (*antarāyikā-dharmas*) to determine her qualifications. The instructor *bhikṣuṇī* asks her the questions in a secluded place, because some of the questions are very personal. The number of questions varies in different versions of the Vinaya. There are 24 questions in the Pāli Vinaya,²⁴ 32 in the Mahāsaṅghika Vinaya,²⁵ 23 in the Dharmagupta Vinaya,²⁶ and 30 in the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya.²⁷

After the candidate is found to be pure and free of obstacles to ordination, she can formally receive the full ordination. The instructor *bhikṣuṇī* should inform the Saṅgha by saying, “I have now finished questioning So-and-so and she is pure. There would be no obstacles to her *upasampadā* ordination.” Then the *karma* master *bhikṣuṇī* recites the three *karmas*: “May the Noble Saṅgha of *bhikṣuṇīs* listen! So-and-so shall receive the *upasampadā* ordination from such-and-such *upādhyāyika bhikṣuṇī*. She is pure and has no obstructing *dharmas*. She has reached the required age (20) and is equipped with a bowl and (five) robes.”²⁸

Now is the proper time for the Saṅgha to grant her *upasampadā* ordination. If you sanction [this *karma*], please keep silent. If you do not sanction it, please voice your objections.”²⁹

This is the first *karma*. The second and the third follow the same pattern. If there are no objections, the *karma* master *bhikṣuṇī* then states the Saṅgha’s decision of assent and the *upasampadā* before the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha. The *śrāmaṇerikā* who has completed this ordination is referred to as a “basic *dharma bhikṣuṇī*.”

The final step of the *bhikṣuṇī* ordination is the ordination from the Bhikṣu Saṅgha. On the same day that the *upasampadā* ordination is given by the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha, the *bhikṣuṇī* precept masters and the candidates (the basic *dharma bhikṣuṇī*) should go to the Bhikṣu Saṅgha, composed of ten *bhikṣu* precept masters. First, the preceptor *bhikṣuṇī* asks the Bhikṣu Saṅgha to grant the *upasampadā* to the candidate. She makes the request as follows: “May the noble Saṅgha of *bhikṣus* listen! So-and-so has received the *upasampadā* ordination from Bhikṣuṇī So-and-so. She has been found to be pure and without obstructing *dharma*s. She has reached the age [of 20] and is equipped with [five] robes and a bowl. She has studied and kept the [*śikṣamāṇā*] precepts purely. Now is the proper time for the Saṅgha to grant her the *upasampadā*.”³⁰

The Bhikṣu Saṅgha expresses its consent by keeping silent. Then the candidate herself must ask the Bhikṣu Saṅgha to grant her the *upasampadā*, repeating the request three times. After the request is granted, the Karma Master *bhikṣu* asks the candidate about the obstructing *dharma*s (exactly the same questions already asked by the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha). After the candidate is found to be pure, the *bhikṣu karma* master performs the final *karmas* to grant the *upasampadā*. These consist of stating the motion once and reciting the three *karmas* and stating the final decision. These *karmas* are the same as recited in the presence of the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha. In the Dharmagupta Vinaya, after the four *karmas* are performed, the *karma* master *bhikṣus* states each of the eight *pārājika* precepts and asks the candidate whether she can keep these eight precepts. He also asks whether she can accept and abide by the four *niśraya dharma*s regarding requisites:³¹ (1) using robes made of rags; (2) begging for food; (3) lodging under trees; and (4) using urine as medicine.³² After she responds in the affirmative to all these questions, the *upasampadā* ordination ceremony is complete, and the candidate becomes a fully ordained *bhikṣuṇī*.

The ordinations for *śrāmaṇerikā*, *śikṣamāṇā*, and *bhikṣuṇī* are basically the same in various Vinayas, with slight differences. All the Vinaya traditions agree that to become a fully ordained *bhikṣuṇī*, a woman has to go through these three stages. The *śrāmaṇerikā* and *śikṣamāṇā* ordinations have to be given by the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha and the ordination of *bhikṣuṇī* by both Bhikṣu and Bhikṣuṇī Saṅghas. This signifies that the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha has the right and

responsibility for screening, accepting, and training its new members.³³ Thus, although the *upasampadā* ordination has to be taken from both Saṅghas, as I. B. Horner states, “If the final decision of allowing a candidate to become a senior rested with the almsmen, the preliminary and formative stages were entrusted to the almswomen. Theirs was the power of acceptance or rejection, and in them was vested, equally with the men, the knowledge of the qualifications necessary for following the higher path.”³⁴

In Taiwan, many of the *bhikṣu* Vinaya masters who have presided over many of the so-called “triple platform” ordinations³⁵ fail to see the significance of the role played by the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha in a woman’s spiritual progress from laywoman to *bhikṣuṇī*. Therefore, they take women as their disciples, ordain them as *śrāmaṇerikā* and *śikṣamāṇā*, and allow nuns to receive the *upasampadā* ordination from the Bhikṣu Saṅgha alone, erroneously according the Bhikṣu Saṅgha full authority for the ordination of women, while in actuality the Buddha entrusted the right and responsibility for training novice nuns to the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha.³⁶

The Establishment of the Chinese Bhikṣu Lineage

According to the *Da song sengshi lue* (*The Brief History of Buddhism in the Song Dynasty*), the first Chinese woman to become a Buddhist nun was named Apan. No record of the date or details about her life can be found. Strictly speaking, she cannot be called a *bhikṣuṇī* because she only took refuge with the Triple Jewels and did not take any other precepts, simply because the Vinaya was not available at the time. The earliest translation of the Vinaya was completed by the Vinaya master Dharmakāla of Central Asia during the Chen-pin period (249–253 CE) in Loyang. He translated the *Sengzhi jixin* (*The Essentials of the Mahāsaṅghika Vinaya*). In 254 CE, another Vinaya master, Dharmasatya, translated the Dharmagupta Karman. This marked the beginning of *bhikṣuṇī* ordination that strictly followed the procedures of the Vinaya. However, the first full ordination of *bhikṣuṇī* did not take place until almost two centuries later, in 434 CE.

The *Biographies of Bhikṣuṇīs* (*Biqiuni zhuan*) records the biography of the first Chinese *bhikṣuṇī*.³⁷ Her name was Jingjian and she was born in 291 CE, the daughter of a magistrate. She was a diligent student as a child and became widowed at an early age. She taught music, writing, and reading to the children of wealthy and noble families. Although she took delight in learning Buddhism, she found no teacher to give her instruction. At last she met the monk Fashi, who was learned in the scriptures, and studied Buddhist teachings under his guidance. One day she said to Fashi, “Since the scriptures mention that there are *bhikṣus* and *bhikṣuṇīs*, I wish to be ordained as a *bhikṣuṇī*.”³⁸ Fashi

told her that, although there were *bhikṣus* and *bhikṣuṇīs* in the Western Land (India), the precepts were incomplete in China.³⁹ Jingjian asked, “What is the difference between the precepts of *bhikṣus* and *bhikṣuṇīs*?” Fashi replied, “A foreign monk said that there are 500 precepts for *bhikṣuṇī*.” Fashi agreed to make inquiries about the *bhikṣuṇī* precepts and ordination for her. He asked the monk Jñānagira from the kingdom of Kashmir, who explained, “The precepts for *bhikṣuṇīs* are basically the same as those for the *bhikṣus*, with only minor differences. But without the proper procedures, nobody can confer the precepts. Nuns can take the ten precepts from the Bhikṣu Saṅgha, but will have no *bhikṣuṇī* preceptors to depend on for their studies.”⁴⁰ Nevertheless, Jingjian was ordained by Jñānagira and took the ten precepts of a *śrāmaṇerikā*, together with 24 other women. During the Hsien-kang period (335-342 CE) of the Jin Dynasty, the monk Sengjian brought back from the Central Asian kingdom of Yuezhi the *Mahāsāṅghika Bhikṣuṇī Karman* and the *Bhikṣuṇī Prātimokṣa*. In the first year of Shengbing (357 CE), the Indian monk Dharmagupta was invited to Loyang to set up a precept platform to confer *bhikṣuṇī* ordination, but the Chinese monk Daochang objected on the basis of the *Jieyin yuanjing* (*Sūtra of the Origin of the Rules*).⁴¹ His objection was probably based on the fact that there were no *bhikṣuṇī* in China to confer the ordination, along with the *bhikṣus*. The ordination ceremony proceeded despite his objections and was performed on a ship in the middle of a river. Jingjian became the first *bhikṣuṇī* in China, together with three other women. More precisely, Jingjian became the first Chinese *bhikṣuṇī* to take the *upasampadā* from only the Bhikṣu Saṅgha. However, all Vinaya systems specify that the *upasampadā* should not be given by *bhikṣus* alone, but by both the Bhikṣu and Bhikṣuṇī Saṅghas. This “incomplete ordination” was not remedied until more than half a century later.

The earliest records of the dual ordination of *bhikṣuṇīs* can be found in the biographies of Guṇavarman and Saṅghavarman, and the *Biographies of Bhikṣuṇīs* (*Biqiuni zhuan*). Guṇavarman, a Vinaya master from Kashmir, came to Yangzhou in 430 CE and translated many Vinaya texts.⁴² Saṅghavarman, a Vinaya master from India, came to Yangzhou four years later, in 434. Both of their biographies found in the *Gaoseng zhuan* (*Biographies of Eminent Monks*) mention their involvement in the dual ordination of the Chinese *bhikṣuṇīs*.⁴³ Nevertheless, the most thorough account of the dual ordination is the biography in the *Biqiuni zhuan* of the nun Sengguo, who was among the first group of Chinese nuns to be fully ordained by both Saṅghas. Sengguo had unusually strong faith and devotion, and presumably had established an affinity with the Dharma in her former lives. It was said that “even as a baby at breast, she did not transgress the monastic rule of not eating after midday.” Although she did not get permission to leave the household life until she was 27, Sengguo diligently pursued Buddhist practice and strictly observed the precepts. Her

meditation practice was at such a high level that she could meditate from dusk to dawn and “stretching in spirit to the pure realm of the divine, her body stayed behind looking as lifeless as dry wood.”⁴⁴ Her biography continues to record how she was involved in the first dual ordination in China.

In the sixth year of the Yuanjia (429 CE), a foreign boat captain named Nanti brought eight *bhikṣuṇīs* from Sri Lanka to the capital of the Sung Dynasty. The Sri Lankan nuns stayed at Ching-fu Ssu (Luminous Blessings Monastery). Not long after, they asked Sengguo, “Have foreign nuns ever been here before?”⁴⁵ Sengguo answered that there have been none. The Sri Lankan *bhikṣuṇīs* then asked, “If that is the case, how were the Chinese nuns able to take full ordination from both Bhikṣu Saṅgha and Bhikṣuṇī Saṅghas?” Sengguo replied,

They took the ordination from the Bhikṣu Saṅgha only. Those women who went through the ritual of entering the monastic life began to receive the monastic obligations. This reception was an expedient means to cause people to have great respect for the monastic life. Our eminent model for this expedient is the Buddha’s own stepmother, Mahāprajāpatī, who is deemed to have accepted the full monastic obligation by taking on herself, and therefore on all women for all time, the eight special prohibitions incumbent on women who want to lead the monastic life. [She accepted these from the Buddha only.] The 500 women of the Buddha’s clan who left the household life at the same time as Mahāprajāpatī considered her their instructor.⁴⁶

Although Sengguo justified the validity of the single ordination observed by the Chinese *bhikṣuṇīs*, taking the case of Mahāprajāpatī as an example and precedent, she still had some doubts. She consulted with Vinaya Master Guṇavarman about whether it was permissible to retake the ordination. Guṇavarman replied, “The Buddhist threefold practice – morality, meditation, and wisdom – progresses from the subtle to the obvious. Therefore, receiving the monastic obligations a second time is of greater benefit than receiving them only once.”⁴⁷

Addressing the question of the validity of the single ordination taken by the Chinese *bhikṣuṇīs*, Guṇavarman said, “Since the *bhikṣuṇī* ordination is finalized by the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha, even if the “basic *dharma*” (i.e., ordination by the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha) is not conferred, such a *bhikṣuṇī* ordination still results in pure vows, just as in the case of Mahāprajāpatī.”⁴⁸ Responding to Sengguo’s question about the possibility of re-ordination, Guṇavarman replied, “Very good! If you wish to increase your wisdom [by retaking the ordination], I will

certainly offer my help with joy. However, since the Sri Lankan *bhikṣuṇīs* [of the first batch to arrive in China] have not reached their “precept age”⁴⁹ and their number is less than ten,⁵⁰ they should first start learning the Chinese language.⁵¹ Four years later, in the tenth year of Yuanjia (433 CE), the ship captain Nanti brought eleven more *bhikṣuṇīs* from Sri Lanka, including one named Tessara. By this time, those *bhikṣuṇīs* who had arrived earlier had become fluent in Chinese, and Guṇavarman had passed away. Therefore, Sengguo and the other Chinese *bhikṣuṇīs* requested the Indian Vinaya master Saṅghavarman to preside over the dual ordination at the ceremonial platform in Nanlin Monastery. Altogether more than 300 women were ordained by both Saṅghas. This marked the beginning of the proper transmission of dual ordination for women in China, that is, of receiving the precepts from both the Bhikṣu and Bhikṣuṇī Saṅghas.⁵²

According to the brief history of the dual ordination in China related above, two things are clear. First, the single ordination that had been conferred since Jingjian’s ordination in 357 CE was valid and pure. As Daoxuan (596–667 CE), the patriarch of the Chinese Dharmagupta Vinaya School, stated in the *Sifen lu zhemo shu jiyuan ji*: Even if a *bhikṣuṇī* ordination is transmitted directly from a Bhikṣu Saṅgha without first conferring the basic *dharma*, it is still valid, since nothing in the Vinaya indicates otherwise. However, the precept masters commit an offence.⁵³ All the Vinayas of the different Buddhist schools specify the requirement of dual ordination. Although it is true that, strictly speaking, a single ordination from either the Bhikṣu or Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha alone is not in accord with the Vinaya, still nowhere does the Vinaya indicate that single ordination is invalid. Daoxuan did not explain why the precept masters commit an offence; presumably it had to do with not following the procedures strictly. When asked the same question,⁵⁴ Guṇavarman answered, “Wherever *bhikṣuṇīs* are available, if a *bhikṣu* preceptor confers a *bhikṣuṇī* ordination to a woman without having first trained her in the precepts for two years, he commits an offence.”⁵⁵ This means that a *bhikṣu* commits an offence if he knowingly gives *bhikṣuṇī* ordination to a woman who has not gone through all the necessary stages (*śrāmaṇerikā*, *śikṣamāṇā*, and *bhikṣuṇī* ordination) from a Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha. As discussed previously, before a *bhikṣu* gives the *bhikṣuṇī* ordination, he must ask the woman whether she has been trained in the *śikṣamāṇā* vows for two years, and whether she has already received ordination from the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha. If he does not ask these questions or knowingly ordains a woman without *śikṣamāṇā* or basic *dharma bhikṣuṇī* status, he, not the woman, commits an offence. The general rule for the outcome of this improper conferring of the ordination is that the precept receiver obtains the precepts, whereas the precept giver commits an offence. Here the main issue is not what offense a

bhikṣu commits for giving the *upasampadā* to a woman who has not received ordination from the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha first. The important point is that an ordination given by the Bhikṣu Saṅgha only, although technically flawed with respect to prescribed procedures, is still valid and a woman taking such an ordination obtains “uncorrupted” and pure vows.

Second, the history of the dual ordination in China clearly shows that the first dual ordination that took place in 434 followed the proper procedures and that the *bhikṣuṇī* lineage thus established was pure and flawless. However, during the conference held in Dharamsala in August 1998, Daohai, a conservative Vinaya master from Taiwan argued otherwise. He argued that the Chinese *bhikṣuṇī* lineage could not be considered “perfect and flawless” for two reasons. The first reason is that Sengguo and the other nuns had previously received *bhikṣuṇī* ordination from *bhikṣus* alone and thus were “not new.” Daohai contends that such an ordination would invalidate subsequent ordinations, though there is nothing in the Vinaya to substantiate his claim. Daohai’s second reason is that Huiguo and the other nuns were not trained in the precepts for two years prior to their dual ordination, although there is no evidence to support this contention.⁵⁶

As the history of the initial dual ordination indicates, after the arrival of the second group of Sri Lankan *bhikṣuṇīs* who made up the necessary quorum of ten, Sengguo and many other nuns took the *upasampadā* first from the Sri Lankan Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha and then from the Bhikṣu Saṅgha headed by Saṅghavarman as preceptor in the very first dual ordination in China. How can this first dual ordination be considered “not a new one,” and thus “incomplete?” Even if it was a re-ordination, nowhere does the Vinaya indicate that re-ordination is invalid. On the contrary, re-ordination was considered a re-affirmation. This can be attested to by the affirmation given in the Sarvāstivāda Śāstra (*Sapolo lun*), which says, “To re-ordain enhances the quality of a previous ordination. One who is re-ordained does not lose one’s previous precept age.”^{57, 58} Therefore, Daohai’s theory, which dismisses the Chinese *bhikṣuṇī* lineage on these grounds is not credible.

Daohai also strongly asserted that Sengguo and the other nuns had not taken the *śikṣamāṇā* ordination and thus had not trained in the precepts for two years, but he did not provide any textual proof for this claim. In fact, it can be argued that the nuns had trained for two years. The first group of Sri Lankan *bhikṣuṇīs* stayed at Jingfu si, the monastery where Sengguo and other nuns lived, for four years before the arrival of the second group. During these four years, it is quite likely that the Sri Lankan *bhikṣuṇīs* conferred the *śikṣamāṇā* ordination on the Chinese nuns to prepare them for the dual ordination. They must have been very keen to make sure that complete and proper ordination procedures for the nuns’ ordinations were observed; otherwise they would not have raised

the question concerning the validity of the previous single ordination. Even if the Chinese nuns did not formally train in the precepts for two years, their dual ordination was still valid and pure, because, as mentioned before, the fault for improperly conferring ordination falls on the *bhikṣus* precept masters, not on the *bhikṣuṇī* precept candidates.

We can conclude that an authentic *bhikṣuṇī* lineage in China was properly established according to the Vinaya in the fifth century. This lineage continues without interruption up to the present day. There is no record that indicates otherwise.

The most detailed record of eminent *bhikṣuṇīs* is the *Biqiuni zhuan* compiled by Baochang in the early sixth century. The 65 biographies included there portray a Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha with a remarkably high level of learning and spiritual attainment. Baochang praised them, saying:

For several hundred years, nuns of great virtue appeared in China one after the other. Of these nuns, Shan-miao and Ching-kuei achieved the epitome of the ascetic life; Fa-pien and Sengguo consummately excelled in meditation and contemplation. Individuals such as Seng-tuan and Seng-chi, who were steadfast in their resolution to maintain chastity, and Miao-hsing and Fa-chuan, who were teachers of great influence, appeared very frequently. Such virtue as theirs is like the deep ocean or the lofty peak – like the harmonious music of bronze and jade bells.⁵⁹

It is evident from these biographies that the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha was very strong from the fourth to sixth centuries. Although two persecutions of Buddhism took place, in 446 and 574 CE, they did not cause lasting destruction to Buddhism. In fact, Buddhism flourished during the Six Dynasties (265–589 CE), especially during the Northern Wei Dynasty (386–534 CE). According to the *Fozu tongji* (*A Chronicle on the Buddha and Patriarchs*), there were four million monks and nuns in the Northern Wei during the sixth century. In the south, Buddhism flourished and was influential as well, especially during the Liang Dynasty, at which time Emperor Wu-ti was renowned for his earnest support of Buddhism.

Buddhism flourished even more during the Sui and Tang Dynasties (581–907), a period referred to as the Golden Age of Buddhism in China. The Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha developed extensively throughout these periods. The *bhikṣuṇīs* came from all walks of life and social classes, and included queens, princesses, ladies of the court, etc. Regrettably, after the *Biqiuni zhuan* was compiled in the sixth century, no biographies of *bhikṣuṇīs* were again compiled.⁶⁰ Still, scattered biographies of *bhikṣuṇīs* can be found in various historical records, such as dynastic histories, epitaphs, bronze and stone inscriptions, etc. Many *bhikṣuṇīs*

were outstanding in teaching, meditation, and moral discipline. In the Chan School some *bhikṣuṇīs* also became teachers of Chan monks.⁶¹

Although Buddhism suffered a great setback and lost much of its vitality due to Tang Emperor Wuzong's persecution that lasted from 841 to 845 CE, it survived intact.⁶² In fact, the census taken during the reign of Emperor Zhengzong of the Song Dynasty (997-1021 CE) reveals that there were more than 397,000 *bhikṣus* and 61,000 *bhikṣuṇīs* at the time.⁶³ As for the lineage of dual ordination, there is no record of any break. On the contrary, there are two records in the *Da song sengshi lue* that clearly indicate that dual ordination was conferred during the eighth and ninth centuries. This document records that in 765 CE Emperor Taizong of Tang decreed that an ordination platform be established in the capital city and that ten *bhikṣus* and ten *bhikṣuṇīs* of great virtue and well-versed in the Vinaya be selected to confer the ordination. It also records that this "became the standard practice forever."⁶⁴ The *Da song sengshi lue* also documents that Emperor Yizong of Tang (859-873 CE) had an ordination platform built in the Hsien-tai Palace, where the nuns of Fu-shou Nunnery received an ordination conferred by ten *bhikṣus* and ten *bhikṣuṇīs*.⁶⁵ This indicates that the dual ordination was a standard practice.

It is well-documented that the dual ordination was carried out from the fifth to the tenth centuries. However, in the fifth year of the Gaibao year (972 CE), the Northern Song Emperor Taizi issued a decree that *bhikṣuṇīs* be prohibited from going to *bhikṣu* monasteries for ordination.⁶⁶ This means that nuns would have to take the *upasampadā* from the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha only. Vinaya master Daohai from Taiwan, drawing on this record, concludes:

In a word, the lineage of *bhikṣuṇī* ordination in China has clearly been broken (to receive the basic rules from a Saṅgha consisting of *bhikṣuṇīs* only, not to mention receiving one-group ordination from *bhikṣus*) during Sung Dynasty (around 972 CE). Following the resolution of the prohibition, most of the ordinations were by one group, from a Saṅgha of *bhikṣus*. There is no historical documentation to prove that the lineage of two-group ordination was pure and complete.⁶⁷

This speculative and incorrect conclusion is drawn without any textual proof. In fact, there are textual references that indicate otherwise. The earliest record of prohibition is found in the *Da song sengshi lue* written by Zan'ning:

After the years of Jianwu (335-348 CE), the nuns had been going to the monasteries of monks to take ordination without interruption throughout all the previous dynasties. Recently

Emperor Taizi (972 CE) issued an edict forbidding nuns from going to the monasteries of monks to take ordination. After that, the nuns obtained the basic *dharma* from the Saṅgha of *bhikṣuṇīs* alone. The ordination was not complete. Now the present Emperor [Taizong, the successor of Taizi] is sagacious and makes intelligent decisions. Those who are protective to the Dharma should make a request to the Emperor to restore the old practice [of dual ordination] lest the Dharma should perish.⁶⁸

Four years after the decree of prohibition issued in 976, Emperor Taizi died and his son Taizong succeeded him. In the same year Zanling compiled the *Da song sengshi lue* (*The Brief History of the Buddhist Saṅgha in the Great Sung*) by order of Emperor Taizong. Taking into consideration that Zanling was an eminent and learned monk respected and trusted by Emperor Taizong, and was ordered by him to compile the history of the Saṅgha and biographies of eminent monks, and also considering that Zanling was very concerned with the effect that the edict might have upon Buddhism, it is possible that he himself made the request to the Emperor to abolish the edict. There is also evidence indicating that the edict lasted for only a few years, certainly not long enough to disrupt the *bhikṣuṇī* lineage. The first evidence that the edict was short-lived is the edict of Emperor Zhenzong (997-1021 CE), issued in 1010 CE, which states:

The edict ordered that in Taipian Xingguo Monastery in the imperial city, the official Ganlu precept platform be established [to give ordination] and that other official precept platforms be established all over the country, 72 in total.⁶⁹

The precept platforms were built by the court and thus were naturally regarded as official. That means that all monks and nuns went to the official precept platforms to take ordination; therefore nuns were able to get dual ordination as usual. Since only 38 years elapsed between the edict of prohibition and the edict of re-establishing the official precept platforms, this was not be long enough for the lineage to totally die out, even in a worst case scenario.

The second source of evidence is Zhipan's *Fozu tongji* (compiled between 1258-1269).⁷⁰ Zhipan comments on the edict of prohibition:

The intention [of the edict] was to keep distance between monks and nuns [not to forbid nuns from taking ordination]. However, [Emperor Taizi] did not know that nuns must take the final ordination from the Bhikṣu Saṅgha. There is no rule [in the Vinaya] that allows nuns to take ordination from their own Saṅgha only. This [edict] was only a temporary remedy

for impropriety and should not be taken as a normal practice. Nowadays the edict is no longer in effect.⁷¹

It is obvious that by the time of Zhipan, the prohibition had already been lifted and the dual ordination restored. From this passage, it is evident that dual ordination was the norm during this period.

There are not many historical documents that indicate how the dual ordination was implemented after the thirteenth century. It is clear that the lineage of dual ordination for *bhikṣuṇīs* continued, however, since at least two historical records of the practice can be found. The first is from Hongzan's *Biqiuni shoujie lu* (*The Record of the Bhikṣuṇī Ordination*) and the second is from Shuyu's *Erbuseng shoujie yishi* (*The Ritual for the Dual Ordination*). In his *Biqiuni shoujie lu* of 1657 CE, Hongzan (1611-1685), a Vinaya master of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912), mentions that when he was in Kuang-chou, many nuns from different counties asked him to give them the *upasampadā* ordination. Therefore, Hongzan assembled ten *bhikṣus* and ten *bhikṣuṇīs* to confer the dual ordination.⁷² Shuyu (1645-1721 CE) was also a Vinaya master. In the preface of his *Erbuseng shoujie yishi*, he records a dual ordination:

In the spring of 1667 CE, the venerable Bhikṣuṇī Mizhao from Kunshan and Madame Xu came to our monastery to make offerings. The *śikṣamāṇā* who accompanied them requested my late master to conduct a dual ordination. They stayed at the monastery to study for half a month and came to know the proper deportment. My late master then asked Bhikṣuṇī Mizhao to be the *upādhyāyika*, Bhikṣuṇī Zhaozeng from Yangzhou to be the *karma* master, and Bhikṣuṇī Yuanzheng from Zhenzhou to be the instructor master. He also chose seven other virtuous *bhikṣuṇīs* as witness masters to preside over the ordination.⁷³

From the above two records, it is very clear that during the seventeenth century the dual ordination was still being carefully implemented and the proper procedures were being observed. However, Hongzan also says that “the dual ordination had been long lost.”⁷⁴ Probably what he meant was that nuns took the ordination from the Bhikṣu Saṅgha alone. However, so far no historical record can be found to verify his statement. Even if Hongzan was right, as discussed earlier in this paper, although the precept master who confers it commits an offense, ordination by the Bhikṣu Saṅgha alone is still valid.

There is another record indicating that the dual ordination had been discontinued. In his *Essence of the Vinaya*, the Vinaya master Hongyi (1880-1942) writes:

According to the rules set forth by the Buddha, *bhikṣuṇīs* must take their ordination twice. First, they take the “basic *dharmā*” from the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha and then take the vows formally from the Bhikṣu Saṅgha. The ordination actually takes effect during the ceremony with the Bhikṣu Saṅgha. However, the dual ordination rule has not been implemented since the Southern Sung Dynasty (1128-1276).⁷⁵

Although Hongyi was a respected Vinaya master, his statement is obviously incorrect. This can be proved by the fact that dual ordinations were given to nuns during the seventeenth century, as Hongzan and Shuyu’s writings show.

Since the time of Hongzan and Shuyu, the tradition of *bhikṣuṇī* ordination has continued until today. Although it is true that in some cases the dual ordination procedure has not been strictly observed,⁷⁶ still the *bhikṣuṇī* ordination and the lineage of Chinese *bhikṣuṇīs* has continued. In other words, in the historical records there is no evidence indicating that there has been any time in Chinese Buddhist history when there were no *bhikṣuṇīs*.

Comparison of the Dharmagupta and the Mūlasarvāstivāda Bhikṣuṇī Prātimokṣa Sūtras

Aside from a concern for the validity of the Chinese *bhikṣuṇī* lineage, Tibetan Buddhist scholars have also been very concerned with the differences between the Dharmagupta *Bhikṣuṇī Prātimokṣa Sūtra* followed by the Chinese Bhikṣu Saṅgha and Bhikṣuṇī Saṅghas and the Mūlasarvāstivāda version followed by the Tibetan Bhikṣu Saṅgha. The Dharmagupta *Bhikṣuṇī Prātimokṣa Sūtra* was translated into Chinese in the Later Jin Dynasty (383-418 CE) by Buddhayaśas. This text has been exclusively followed by the Chinese *bhikṣuṇī* since the Tang Dynasty when the Dharmagupta Vinaya School was established. There are two Chinese translations of the Mūlasarvāstivādin *Bhikṣuṇī Prātimokṣa Sūtra* and Vinaya: one is the *Genben shouyi jieyou bu biqiuni jiejing*⁷⁷ and the other is *Genben shouyi jieyou bu biqiuni binaye*.⁷⁸ Both of these texts were translated by Yi-ching during the Tang Dynasty. There are also two Tibetan translations of the Mūlasarvāstivādin Bhikṣuṇī Vinaya: the *Bhikṣuṇī Prātimokṣa Sūtra* (*Dge slon mabī so sor thar pabī mdo*) and the *Bhikṣuṇī Vinaya-vibhaṅga* (*Dge slon mabī bdul ba rnam par hbyed pa*). Although the texts exist, no Tibetan *bhikṣuṇī* lineage has ever been established based on these texts.

Much important research on Bhikṣuṇī Vinaya and translation of the *Prātimokṣa Sūtras* from Sanskrit and other languages have been done by scholars. For example, Akira Hirakawa’s *Ritsuzo no Kenkyo* (*Studies on*

the *Vinaya Scriptures*) has a section on the *Prātimokṣa Sūtra* from various Vinaya traditions, Karma Lekshe Tsomo's *Sisters in Solitude* contains English translations of the Chinese Dharmagupta and the Tibetan Mūlasarvāstivādin *Bhikṣuṇī Prātimokṣa* as well as a comparative study of these two traditions, and Chatsumarn Kabilsingh has published *A Comparative Study of Bhikkhuni Pātimokkha*. This section of the paper is based on their research.

Despite minor variations in the number of the precepts, the categories of precepts cited in the Dharmagupta and the Mūlasarvāstivādin *Bhikṣuṇī Prātimokṣa Sūtras* are identical, namely, the *pārājika-dharma*, *saṅghavaśeṣa-dharma*, *nihsargika-dharma*, *pāyantika-dharma*, *pratideśanīya-dharma*, *śaikṣa-dharma*, and *adhikaraṇa-samatha-dharma*. The number of precepts in each category is as follows.⁷⁹

Category	Dharmagupta (Chinese)	Mūlasarvāstivāda (Tibetan)
Pārājika	8	8
Saṅghavaśeṣa	17	20
Nihsargika-pāyantika	30	33
Pāyantika	178	180
Pratideśanīya	8	11
śaikṣa	100	113
Adhikaraṇa-samatha	7	7
Total	348	372

The eight *pārājika* offenses for *bhikṣuṇīs* are basically the same, not only in the Dharmagupta and Mūlasarvāstivāda versions, but in all extant versions of the *Bhikṣuṇī Prātimokṣa*. The eight *pārājika* include prohibitions against: (1) sexual conduct, (2) stealing, (3) taking life, (4) falsely claiming the attainment of supernatural powers, (5) touching a male's body or being aroused with desire, (6) touching a man's clothes or entering a covered place with a man, (7) concealing the wrongdoing of a *bhikṣuṇī* guilty of a serious offence, and (8) persistently following a suspended monk, after the third admonishment. The *pārājikas* are identical in the two versions; however, the Mūlasarvāstivādin *Bhikṣuṇī Prātimokṣa* includes a prohibition against taking the life of a human fetus (in other words, abortion), whereas the Chinese Dharmagupta text makes no mention of a fetus.

The category of *saṅghavaśeṣa* has 17 precepts in the Dharmagupta and 20 in the Mūlasarvāstivāda. Of the 17 *saṅghavaśeṣa* in the Dharmagupta, only one has no equivalent among those in the Mūlasarvāstivāda, namely, accusing a layperson before a government official. The Mūlasarvāstivāda has one *saṅghavaśeṣa* which has no equivalent in the Dharmagupta, namely, pursuing the wealth of the deceased. The reason that there is a difference in the number of *saṅghavaśeṣas* between the two versions, 17 versus 20, is because the seventh

saṅghāvaśeṣa of the Dharmagupta combines the four “alone precepts” into one, while the Mūlasarvāstivāda lists them separately. These precepts include crossing water alone, entering a village alone, staying overnight in a village alone, and staying behind the group alone.

According to Karma Lekshe Tsomo, only two out of the 17 *saṅghāvaśeṣa* in the Chinese version have no equivalent among the *saṅghāvaśeṣa* in the Tibetan translation: accusing a layperson before a government official and ordaining a woman known to be a thief. On the other hand, six *saṅghāvaśeṣa* in the Tibetan translation have no equivalent in the Chinese, though some occur elsewhere: (1) ordaining a woman without permission from her guardian, (2) pursuing the wealth of the deceased, (3) forsaking the Dharma, (4) digging up faults of *bhikṣuṇīs*, (5) misbehaving with women, (6) and enjoining *bhikṣuṇīs* who are misbehaving together not to live separately.⁸⁰

In the category of the *nihsargika-pāyantika*, all Vinaya versions list 30 precepts, except the Mūlasarvāstivāda which has 33 precepts. Among the 30 precepts, 16 concern robes and the proper time and manner to obtain them; two concern the begging bowl; one concerns medication; eight concern business exchange; and three concern gold and silver.⁸¹ There is one *nihsargika-pāyantika* in the Dharmagupta that has no equivalent in the Mūlasarvāstivāda: accepting a robe in an emergency and keeping it beyond the proper time. There are four rules in the Mūlasarvāstivāda that have no equivalent in the Dharmagupta: washing clothes and cooking for an unrelated *bhikṣu*, taking a robe from an unrelated *bhikṣu*, having one’s upper robe blessed on a new moon, and openly begging for oneself. In the *pāyantika* category, the Dharmagupta has 178 precepts while the Mūlasarvāstivāda has 180. Among these precepts, three occur only in the Dharmagupta whereas 30 precepts occur only in the Mūlasarvāstivāda.⁸²

A number of *pāyantikas* deal with offenses related to ordination. For example, there are 12 precepts common to both the Dharmagupta and Mūlasarvāstivāda. These include ordaining: (1) a pregnant woman, (2) a *śrāmaṇerikā* not trained for two years in the six rules, (3) a married girl less than 12 years, (4) a married girl of 12 years but not agreed upon by the Saṅgha, (5) a prostitute, (6) a woman with a husband, (7) a woman less than 20 years old, and (8) an emotionally disturbed woman. The additional precepts include: (9) not taking care of one’s trainee after giving ordination; (10) not ordaining a well-qualified *sikṣamāṇā*; (11) not going before the Bhikṣu Saṅgha on the same day as the ordination with the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha; and (12) giving full ordination before one has been a *bhikṣuṇī* for 12 years.⁸³

There are several *pāyantika* precepts that are not found in the Mūlasarvāstivāda, namely, ordaining a woman with both male and female organs, ordaining a woman who discharges urine and excrement from her

orifices, and ordaining a woman who is nursing. The rule that a *bhikṣuṇī* cannot give ordination every year (that is, a *bhikṣuṇī* can only ordain disciples every other year) is found only in the Mūlasarvāstivāda. It is worth mentioning that although the eight *gurudharmas* specify that a woman should take full ordination from both Saṅghas, among all the Vinaya traditions, only the Mahīśāsaka Vinaya contains a precept against ordaining a woman by one Saṅgha only.

There is a very important principle behind all these rules concerning *bhikṣuṇī* ordination, which is that no offense is incurred by women who receive ordination in violation of these rules; instead, an offence is incurred by the *bhikṣu* or *bhikṣuṇī* precept masters who give the ordination. For example, during the Buddha's time, it happened that a woman was ordained and later found that she was pregnant. Although pregnancy and childbirth would be a hindrance to her religious life, the Buddha did not invalidate her ordination. Instead, he allowed her to give birth to her child and raise it among the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha.⁸⁴ On the basis of this incident, a rule was established prohibiting the ordination of a pregnant woman. However, in the event of an infraction of this precept, the fault lies with the *bhikṣu* or *bhikṣuṇī* who knowingly gives ordination to a pregnant woman, rather than with the woman herself. The principle that the precept masters take the responsibility or blame for a violation of the ordination procedures applies similarly to the matter of dual ordination. That is to say, if *bhikṣu* precept masters give full ordination to women who have not taken full ordination from the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha first, the women commit no offence; rather, the *bhikṣu* precept masters commit an offence. The rationale for this principle is that the precept masters should know the rules better than the candidates; therefore, should any violation of the ordination rules occur, the fault falls on the precept givers rather than the precept receivers. In any case, even if such an infraction of the ordination procedures occurs, the *bhikṣuṇīs* who receive ordination from the Bhikṣu Saṅgha alone still obtain a pure and flawless ordination.

In the *pratideśanīya* category, all Vinaya traditions have eight rules, except the Mūlasarvāstivāda, which has eleven. In the Dharmagupta, the eight rules include asking for the following foods when a *bhikṣuṇī* is not sick: cheese, oil, honey, sugar, milk, cream, fish, and meat. In the Mūlasarvāstivāda, the rules include asking for milk, yogurt, butter, ghee, oil, honey, sugar, fish, meat, dried meat when a *bhikṣuṇī* is not sick, and partaking of food in a learner's house without being invited.

Finally, in the *śaikṣa* category, the Dharmagupta has 100 rules whereas the Mūlasarvāstivāda has 99, and the rules differ considerably.⁸⁵ The number of *śaikṣa* rules of various types are as follows.⁸⁶

Type of rule	Dharmagupta	Mūlasarvāstivāda
1. Manner of wearing robes	2	12
2. Manner of entering a devotee's house	25	26
3. Manner of accepting and eating food	23	35
4. Manner of exhortation	20	22
5. Manner of urinating and passing excrement	3	3
6. Climbing a tree higher than the height of a human	1	1
7. Behavior related to <i>cetiya</i>	26	0
Total	100	99

The most obvious difference between the two renditions is that the Dharmagupta has 26 rules related to *cetiya*. This difference reflects the great importance the Dharmagupta school places on the worship of *cetiya*. The last category of *bhikṣuṇī* precepts includes the seven *adhikaraṇa-samatha* rules which are the same in both Vinaya traditions. These rules deal with legal questions regarding the settling of disputes about the Dharma and the Vinaya.

This brief comparison shows how the precepts in the *Bhikṣuṇī Prātimokṣa Sūtras* of these two Vinaya traditions agree and differ. The two traditions do not differ much regarding the more important precepts in the *pārājika*, *saṅghāvaśeṣa*, and *nihsargika-pāyantika* categories. Most of the differences are found in the *śaikṣa* rules: the manner of accepting and eating food, behavior related to *cetiyas*, etc. These rules are the basic guidelines for daily conduct and decorum for the *bhikṣuṇīs* and are not related to fundamental ethics or moral principles. Inasmuch as these rules do not appear in any penal section, there is no punishment for violating them; a transgression is not considered a criminal act, but simply bad manners.⁸⁷ Some of the rules seem unrealistic and archaic and can therefore be considered “lesser and minor precepts” that can legitimately be abolished.⁸⁸ For example, one *śaikṣa* rule requires a *bhikṣuṇī* “not to give teachings while standing to one who is sitting, unless the person is sick.” Obviously this reflects modes of behavior current at the time, but the application of this rule is somewhat irrelevant in the present day.

In sum, if the Tibetan Buddhist traditions were to establish a *bhikṣuṇī* lineage based on both the Dharmagupta and Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinayas, it would not encounter any serious problems in terms of keeping precepts, because even though there are differences between the Dharmagupta and Mūlasarvāstivāda *Bhikṣuṇī Prātimokṣas*, the differences are minor and the essence of the two Vinayas is the same.

The Possible Establishment of a Tibetan Bhikṣuṇī Lineage

In light of the discussion above, there are two possible ways to establish a Tibetan Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha. One is through dual ordination by both Bhikṣu and Bhikṣuṇī Saṅghas, and the other is through single ordination from the Bhikṣu Saṅgha only. Ordination alone can be ruled out because it is specifically prohibited in the eight gurudharmas, the *bhikṣuṇī* karman, and the commentaries of all Vinaya traditions. An analysis of these two possibilities follows.

Ordination from Both Bhikṣu and Bhikṣuṇī Saṅghas. As the eight *gurudharmas* specify, a *bhikṣuṇī* should receive full ordination from both the Bhikṣu and Bhikṣuṇī Saṅghas. If the Tibetan Buddhist tradition is to establish a *bhikṣuṇī* lineage strictly according to the Vinaya, using the procedure of dual ordination, it must depend on a Buddhist tradition that has a living Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha. At present, the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha exists only in China, Korea, Taiwan, and Vietnam. Since the Korean and Vietnamese *bhikṣuṇī* lineages were both received from China, it is better that Tibetan Buddhism seek the help of the Chinese Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha.

Although Tibetan Buddhism has *śrāmaṇerikā*, they are ordained by Tibetan *bhikṣus*, not by *bhikṣuṇīs*. Strictly speaking, this is not in accord with the Vinaya, which specifies that women should be ordained at each and every stage (*śrāmaṇerikās*, *śikṣamāṇā*, and basic *dharma bhikṣuṇī*) by the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha. Therefore, to establish a *bhikṣuṇī* lineage, Tibetan Buddhists can request respected elder Chinese *bhikṣuṇīs* to ordain laywomen practicing in the Tibetan tradition as *śrāmaṇerikās*. When the *śrāmaṇerikās* become 18 years old, the Chinese *bhikṣuṇī* masters can give them *śikṣamāṇā* ordination and train them for two years in the six *śikṣamāṇā* precepts. The two years' training is very important because the novices are tested to see whether they can keep the precepts and whether they are determined enough to lead a rigorous religious life. After two years of training, the Chinese *bhikṣuṇī* precept masters should give them the full ordination (*upasampadā*). Ten *bhikṣuṇī* precept masters, who must have been *bhikṣus* for at least 12 years, are needed to give the ordination. After taking this ordination from the Chinese Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha, the Tibetan nuns become "basic *dharma bhikṣuṇīs*." The final stage of the full ordination is taking ordination from the Bhikṣu Saṅgha. The Tibetan basic *dharma bhikṣuṇīs* have two choices: they can take the full ordination either from the Chinese Bhikṣu Saṅgha or the Tibetan Bhikṣu Saṅgha.

Taking the matter of Vinaya lineage into consideration, it is probably better that the Tibetan basic *dharma bhikṣuṇīs* take the ordination from the Tibetan Bhikṣu Saṅgha. This way, when the Tibetan *bhikṣu* precept masters give the

ordination, they can transmit the Mūlasarvāstivādin *Bhikṣuṇī Prātimokṣa* to the Tibetan basic *dharma bhikṣuṇīs* and no problems will arise as a result of the *bhikṣus* and *bhikṣuṇīs* following different Vinaya lineages. The *śrāmaṇerikā* and *śikṣamāṇā* ordinations taken earlier from the Chinese Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha, would be no problem, since the ten *śrāmaṇerikā* precepts and the six *śikṣamāṇā* precepts are basically the same in the Dharmagupta and Mūlasarvāstivādin Vinayas.

To summarize, the first Tibetan *bhikṣuṇī* dual ordination can be conferred by a Chinese Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha in conjunction with Tibetan *bhikṣus*. Tibetan Buddhists can take the first dual ordination of *bhikṣuṇīs* in China as a precedent. As discussed above, the Chinese nuns received the dual ordination from the Sri Lankan Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha and the Chinese Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha. Although it is not known precisely which Vinaya tradition was transmitted to the Chinese *bhikṣuṇīs*, it apparently was not the Theravāda Vinaya that the Sri Lankan *bhikṣuṇīs* followed. In other words, it is likely that the initial dual ordination of *bhikṣuṇīs* in China itself was a combination of two different Vinaya traditions. This is significant in that no question has ever been raised concerning the validity of this lineage.

A dual ordination conferred by the Chinese Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha and the Tibetan Bhikṣu Saṅgha could be given continuously for 12 years until finally there would be a group of Tibetan *bhikṣuṇīs* who have been ordained for the required 12 years and would therefore be qualified to conduct the ordination themselves.⁸⁹ According to the Mūlasarvāstivādin tradition, the Tibetan *bhikṣuṇīs* would need to be at least 12 in number. After maintaining the *bhikṣuṇī* precepts for 12 years, they would be qualified to serve as precept masters to other Tibetan nuns. After that, Tibetan Buddhism would no longer have to depend on Chinese *bhikṣuṇīs* for conducting the dual ordination.

Ordination by the Tibetan Bhikṣu Saṅgha Alone. If the Tibetan Buddhist tradition wants to avoid combining two different Vinaya traditions in establishing its Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha, it can do it by depending on its own Bhikṣu Saṅgha without help from Chinese *bhikṣuṇīs*. As discussed above, the Indian Vinaya master Guṇavarman as well as Chinese Vinaya master Daoxuan asserted that a single ordination from the Bhikṣu Saṅgha alone and a dual ordination from both Saṅghas are not different in terms of the validity of the ordination. In other words, regardless of the procedure used, both types of full *bhikṣuṇī* ordination result in pure and flawless vows for the *bhikṣuṇī* ordination candidate. The only difference is that the *bhikṣus* who give the single ordination commit an offense of *pāyantika*. The Tibetan tradition could have ten Tibetan *bhikṣu* precept masters give the *bhikṣuṇī* ordination according to the Mūlasarvāstivādin Vinaya to a group of Tibetan nuns. In this way, the Tibetan

nuns would become *bhikṣuṇīs* and the *bhikṣus* would commit a *pāyantika*. Since these Tibetan precept masters would commit a *pāyantika* and would have to confess their transgression, it would be better not to have the same group of precept masters give the *bhikṣuṇī* ordination every time, so that they will not commit the same offense again and again.⁹⁰

Theoretically, the establishment of a Tibetan *bhikṣuṇī* lineage by the Tibetan Bhikṣu Saṅgha is feasible. The Tibetan tradition could initiate a dual ordination of *bhikṣuṇīs* as soon as the first group of at least 12 Tibetan *bhikṣuṇīs* ordained by the Tibetan Bhikṣu Saṅgha had been ordained for 12 years. The feasibility and validity of such an ordination is based on the assumption that the Bhikṣu Saṅgha has the final authority in the *bhikṣuṇī* ordination process. The initial ordination process by Tibetan *bhikṣus* alone would be justified, because no Tibetan *bhikṣuṇīs* are currently available to give the *bhikṣuṇī* ordination. If all schools of Tibetan Buddhism come to a consensus and agree that a *bhikṣuṇī* ordination conducted by the Tibetan Bhikṣu Saṅgha alone is valid under these circumstances, most of the problems concerning the establishment of a *bhikṣuṇī* lineage will be solved. However, the Tibetan Buddhists who choose this solution may be challenged as to why they previously did not seek the help of the Chinese *bhikṣuṇīs*, when a valid lineage exists. If Chinese nuns in the fifth century could seek the help of Sri Lankan *bhikṣuṇīs*, how much more easily Tibetan Buddhists could seek the help of the Chinese *bhikṣuṇīs* today. Not to seek the help of a recognized extant *bhikṣuṇī* lineage when the Chinese *bhikṣuṇī* are ready and willing to help, and to continue questioning the purity of the Chinese lineage could easily be taken as an affront.

Although both these ways of establishing a Tibetan Buddhist *bhikṣuṇī* lineage suggested here are slightly flawed, both are feasible because neither is against the principles or spirit of the Mūlasarvāstivādin and Dharmagupta Vinayas. Tibetan Buddhism is known for putting great importance on unbroken lineages. Since a Mūlasarvāstivādin *bhikṣuṇī* lineage cannot be found anywhere in the world today, the Tibetans will have to choose between either a dual ordination with the help of the *bhikṣuṇī* lineage of other traditions or a single ordination from their own Bhikṣu Saṅgha. If they decide to conduct a dual ordination, they will have to accept the fact that the Chinese *bhikṣuṇī* lineage has continued unbroken since its establishment in the fifth century and that the conjunction of two different lineages poses no problem because all Vinaya lineages derive from the Buddha. If they choose to conduct a single ordination, they will have to accept the premise that an ordination from the Bhikṣu Saṅgha alone is valid when a Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha is not available. Tibetan *bhikṣus* have been giving *śrāmaṇerikā* ordinations to women for centuries and consider this practice valid because of the unavailability of *bhikṣuṇīs*. Using

the same logic, they can legitimately give Tibetan nuns *bhikṣuṇī* ordination.⁹¹ Besides, nowhere does any Vinaya specify that a *bhikṣuṇī* ordination given by a Bhikṣu Saṅgha only, even though incomplete, is invalid. All that is required is that certain Tibetan *bhikṣus* be willing to take the lead in initiating the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha in the Tibetan tradition.

Conclusion

To establish a Tibetan *bhikṣuṇī* lineage involves significant and complex issues. The issues include the doctrinal, social (the passivity of the uneducated Tibetan nuns themselves and the activism of Western nuns), cultural (the conservatism of the *bhikṣus*), the political (Chinese government resistance to any kind of Buddhist activity), etc. This paper only deals with the doctrinal issues, namely, what constitutes an authentic ordination, the validity of the Chinese *bhikṣuṇī* lineage, and the compatibility of the Dharmagupta and Mūlasarvāstivādin Vinayas. Based on these arguments, it can be concluded that all traditional Buddhist criteria for the establishment of a *bhikṣuṇī* lineage in Tibet are fulfilled. Hesitancy to find a way to initiate *bhikṣuṇī* ordination by Tibetan institutions could be viewed as the sexism of patriarchal culture, but sexism will only function to prevent the fulfillment of the Dharma by ignoring the spiritual needs of Tibetan Buddhist women and obstructing the world's need for the Dharma.

Although Tibetan nuns (*śrāmaṇerikā*) have been in existence for many centuries, they have never enjoyed the same level of support as monks have and have always faced more obstacles. *Bhikṣuṇī* ordination is the right and obligation of a nun. Any decision regarding the establishment of a Tibetan *bhikṣuṇī* lineage should be taken from a stance of compassion wishing to benefit Tibetan women, the Dharma, and the world. Rather than stand on a technicality and take a position that will be viewed as sexist from a modern standpoint, Tibetan *bhikṣus* should be able to see the great benefit that nuns can accomplish. As Ven. M. Wimalasara said to the Tibetan monks when he attended the First Seminar of Vinaya Scholars Concerning the Lineage of *Bhikṣuṇī* Ordination in Dharamsala in 1998, "If you have good intentions, you will find a way." Many women in the Tibetan tradition are waiting to assess the intentions of their Bhikṣu Saṅgha. They expect the Tibetan monks to find a way and make a favorable decision to fulfill their wishes.

NOTES

1. The first conference was held in November, 1997 in Taipei, Taiwan. It was sponsored by the Center for Buddhist Studies at National Taiwan University. The Dalai Lama sent Geshe Tashi Tsering to attend the conference. The other participants included Chinese *bhikṣuṇīs*, *bhikṣus*, and scholars. The discussions concentrated mainly on two topics: (1) the formation and development of the Chinese *bhikṣuṇīs* lineage and (2) the difference between the vinaya systems of Dharmagupta and Mūlasarvāstivāda. The second conference was held in August, 1998 in Dharamsala. It was sponsored by the Department of Religious and Cultural Affairs of the Tibetan Government in exile and included Vinaya masters from Taiwan, the Theravāda tradition and the Tibetan tradition. Among the invited speakers, there was only one *bhikṣuṇī* representative, apparently a very uneven ratio.

2. The story of how Mahāprajāpatī became a nun can be found in the following sources: (1) Pali Cullavagga X (I. B. Horner, *The Book of the Discipline*, Pali Text Society, London, 1975, Vol. 5, pp. 352-56); (2) *Madhyamāgama* (T.1, pp. 605a-607b); (3) *Gautamī-vyākaraṇa Sūtra* (T.1, pp. 856a-858a); (4) Dharmagupta Vinaya (T.22, pp. 922c-923c); (5) Mahāsaṅghika Vinaya (T.22, pp. 471a-471b); (6) Mahīśāsaka Vinaya (T.22, pp. 185b-186b); (7) Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya (T.24, pp. 350b-351a); (8) *Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī Bhikṣuṇī Sūtra* (T.24, pp. 945b-947a).

3. Horner, *The Book of the Discipline*, Vol. 5, p. 352.

4. *Mānatta* means "joy to the penitent", resulting from confession and absolution; it is also a term for penance, or punishment.

5. The *Sifen lu*, T.22, p. 923a-b.

6. There is some debate about whether or not the eight chief rules are an accurate representation of the words of the Buddha. First, the formation of the eight rules goes against the Buddha's general procedure for establishing precepts, which is, whenever a monk or nun did or said something improper, accordingly a precept was set up to prevent future occurrence. Second, there is evidence that at least some of the eight rules did not exist at the time that the *bhikṣuṇī* lineage was established. For example, the *pācittiya* rule 52 in the *Pāli Bhikṣuṇī Vibhaṅga* says, "Whichever nuns were to verbally abuse or revile a monk – this is an offence involving expiation." (For the background of the formation of this rule, see Gregory Schopen, "The Suppression of Nuns and the Ritual Murder of their Special Dead in Two Buddhist Monastic Texts," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 24 (1996): 563-92) This rule is equivalent to the second rule of the eight chief rules. If the eight rules were proclaimed before the establishment of the *Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha*, this *pācittiya* rule would not have to be proclaimed again.

7. *Sifen lu* (*Dharmagupta Vinaya*), T.22, p. 925a.

8. For a detailed discussion of the need for consent of parents or husband, see I. B. Horner, *Women in Primitive Buddhism: Laywomen and Almswomen* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1930), pp. 174-84. The *Pāli Vinaya* states, "Let no son, almsman, receive the *pabbajjā* ordination without his father's and his mother's consent. He who confers the *pabbajjā* ordination [on a son without that permission] is guilty of a

- dukkata offence.” (I. B. Horner, *Women in Primitive Buddhism*, p. 149). The Ssu-fen Lu also states, “If a *bhikṣuṇī* ordains a woman without first receiving the permission of her guardian, at that instant, her act is to be considered a *saṅghavaśeṣa* offense.” The “guardian” refers to the parents, husband, mother-in-law, father-in-law or uncles. According to the Therīgāthā, it seems that this rule was closely followed during the Buddha’s time. However, nowadays in Taiwan, where there is a large number of *bhikṣuṇīs*, this rule is not very strictly observed. In the case of a woman who cannot get consent from her parents or husband, it is argued that an adult woman has a legal right to act on her own behalf and make her own decision without anybody’s consent.
9. *Danwude lubu za zhemo* (*The Karma of the Dharmagupta Vinaya*), T.22, pp. 1047c- 1048a.
 10. *Sifen lu*, T.22, pp. 810c-p. 811a. The Mahāsaṅghika Vinaya specifies that a “crow-chasing” *śrāmaṇera* is between the age of seven to 13 (T.22, p. 461b).
 11. Akira Hirakawa, *Monastic Discipline for the Buddhist Nuns* (Patna: Kashi Prasad Jayasawal Research Institute, 1982), p. 299.
 12. *Sifen lu*, T.22, p. 756a-b.
 13. *Shisong lu*, T.23, p. 326a.
 14. T.22, p. 1037c. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, *Sisters in Solitude: Two Traditions of Monastic Discipline for Women, A Comparative Analysis of the Dharmagupta and Mulasarvāstivāda Bhikṣuṇī Prātimokṣa Sūtras* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 54.
 15. For a discussion of the *sīkṣamānā* precepts in the various Vinaya traditions, see Hirakawa, *Monastic Discipline for the Buddhist Nuns*, pp. 53-54.
 16. T.22, p. 924b-c.
 17. T.23, p. 1005a.
 18. T.22, p. 1048a.
 19. A *karma* is a religious action, service, or performance; it refers to the meeting of the monks or nuns for the purpose of ordination, confession, or expulsion of the unrepentant. (William Soothill, *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms* (Fokuangshan, Taiwan: Buddhist Culture Service), p. 442.)
 20. T.22, p. 1048b.
 21. Ibid.
 22. T.22, p.1048c.
 23. According to the Mulasarvāstivāda Vinaya, there should be twelve *bhikṣuṇī* precept masters.
 24. Horner, *The Book of the Discipline*, Vol. 5, p. 375.
 25. Hirakawa, *Monastic Discipline for Buddhist Nuns*, pp. 60-62.
 26. T. 22, p. 1048c.
 27. T.24, p. 461c-462a. The questions include: (1) whether the candidate has received permission from her parents or husband; (2) whether she has completed the two year study of the precepts; (3) whether she has committed a serious offense (such as killing her parents); (4) whether she has a *upādhyāyikā*; (5) whether she is a woman; and (6) whether she has diseases such as leprosy, scabies, tuberculosis, mental disease, etc.
 28. A *bhikṣuṇī* should have three robes (*kaśāya*): (1) *saṅghātī* (outer or “assembly” robe), (2) *uttarāsaṅghā* (upper robe), and (3) *antaravāsaka* (vest or shirt).
 29. T.22, p. 1049a.

30. T.22, p. 1049b.

31. In the Mahīśāsaka and Dharmagupta Vinayas, four *nīśrayas* are mentioned; the other Vinayas mention only three.

32. In the Mahīśāsaka, Sarāvāstivāda and Mūlasarvāstivādin Vinayas, the three *nīśrayas* are explained before taking the *upasampadā* to make sure that the candidate understands the austere life she will have to lead. However, in the Dharmagupta and the Pāli Vinaya, the *nīśrayas* are explained after the *upasampadā*.

33. Nowadays in both Chinese and Tibetan Buddhist traditions, it is a common practice for the *bhikṣus* to ordain laywomen and confer the *śrāmaṇerikā* vows. However, this practice is not in accord with the Vinaya.

34. Horner, *The Book of the Discipline* p. 144.

35. The so-called “three-platform ordination” includes the *śrāmaṇerikā* and *śikṣamāṇā*, *upasampadā* (*bhikṣu* and *bhikṣuṇī*), and *bodhisattva* ordinations. Usually it takes one month for all the procedures.

36. According to all the Vinaya traditions, women should take the *pravrajyā*, *śrāmaṇerikā*, *śikṣamāṇā*, and *bhikṣuṇī* ordinations from the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha. Therefore, strictly speaking, a *bhikṣu* should not ordain a woman as his disciple. However, the ordination of female disciples by *bhikṣu* is a very common practice in Taiwanese and Tibetan Buddhism.

37. *The Biographies of Bhikṣuṇīs* (*Biqiuni zhuan*), compiled in 516 CE by the monk Baochang, record the lives of 65 eminent *bhikṣuṇīs*. For the English translation of this text, see Kathryn Ann Tsai, *Lives of the Nuns* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994).

38. T.50, p. 934c.

39. During Jingjian’s time, the Dharmagupta Karman, which describes the karma procedures for the ordination of *bhikṣuṇīs*, had already been translated, but it was probably not available in south China. The Sarvāstivāda Vinaya was the first complete version of the Vinaya to be translated and it was not completed until 404 CE. This is why Fashi said that the “precepts” were incomplete.

40. T.50, p. 934c.

41. Another name for the *Jieyin yuanjing* is *Binaye* (Vinaya), T.24. pp.

851b–899c. 42. The Vinaya texts that Guavarman translated include the *Shaxin*, *Karman of the Dharmagupta Vinaya*, *Brief Treatise on the Five Precepts of the Upāsaka*, and *Twenty-two Precepts of the Upāsaka*, etc. (T.50, p. 340a).

43. T.50, p. 341b and T.50, pp. 342b.

44. Tsai, *Lives of the Nuns*, p. 53.

45. There is another record of the arrival of the *bhikṣuṇīs* from India in the *Biqiuni shoujie lu* (*The Record of the Bhikṣuṇīs’ Taking Precepts*). This text says, “During the end of Han Dynasty and the beginning of Wei Dynasty (around 220 CE) two *bhikṣuṇīs* from eastern India came to [the capital] Chang-an. They asked the Chinese nuns from whom they had received the precepts. They replied that they had only taken the five and ten precepts from the Bhikṣu Saṅgha. These two Indian *bhikṣuṇīs* sighed and said that the nuns of the borderland (i.e., Chinese nuns) were not fully ordained. They then returned to their country and solicited 15 *bhikṣuṇīs* to come to China to administer the *bhikṣuṇī* ordination; of these *bhikṣuṇīs* three died in the snow mountains and two died from falling into dark gorges. Only ten of them survived and

reached China. Thereupon many Chinese nuns went to the capital city to receive the full ordination. Later these Indian *bhikṣuṇīs* went to the area of Wu (south of Yangtze River) and gave ordination to Chinese nuns there, too.” (*Xuzangjing*, Vol. 60, p. 708b.) This account is not found anywhere except the *Biqiuni shoujie lu* by Hongzan. Since this text was not written until the 16th century, its authenticity is dubious.

46. Tsai, *Lives of the Nuns*, p. 54; T.50, p. 939c.

47. Ibid.

48. T.50, p. 341b.

49. For a *bhikṣuṇī* to be qualified to act as a preceptor she must have been fully ordained as a *bhikṣuṇī* for more than 12 years.

50. There should be ten *bhikṣuṇīs* (the three preceptors and three witnesses) to confer *bhikṣuṇī* ordination.

51. T.50, p. 341b.

52. In the biography of the nun Baoxian, the year given for this ordination is 434 CE.

53. *Manji Zokuzo Kyo (Xuzangjing)*, Vol. 64 (Taipei: Baima Publisher), p. 454.

54. The nun Huiguo asked Guavarman, “All the Buddhist nuns here in China who earlier received the obligation to keep the rules did not receive them according to the fundamentals of the rituals. They had as their eminent precedent the Buddha’s step-mother, Mahāprajāpatī. But those first Chinese nuns did not know, and neither do I, whether there is any difference [between Mahāprajāpatī’s situation and that of the nuns who came after her].” Guavarman replied, “There is no difference.” Huiguo continued, “According to the literature of the monastic regulations that I have read, the teacher who administers the rules and the obligation to follow them has committed an offense by permitting women to receive the rules from the Assembly of Monks only. [Therefore, how can there be no difference?]” Tsai, *Lives of the Nuns*, p. 37; T.50, p. 937b.

55. T.50, p. 937b.

56. Daohai, “Discussion of *Bhikṣuṇī* Ordination and its Lineage in China: Based on Scriptures of Chinese Vinaya and Historical Facts,” paper delivered in the 1st Seminar of Vinaya Scholar Concerning the Lineage of *Bhikṣuṇī* Ordination, Dharamsala, August 3-5, 1998, p. 18.

57. The “precept age” refers to the number of years a monk or nun has been fully ordained as a *bhikṣu* or *bhikṣuṇī*.

58. T.49, p. 344c.

59. Tsai, *Lives of the Nuns*, p. 17.

60. For a detailed study of *bhikṣuṇīs* in Tang Dynasty, see Yu-chen Lee, *Dangdai de biqiuni (Bhikṣuṇīs in the Tang)*, (Taipei: Xieshen Publisher, 1989).

61. In almost every important dynasty, the biographies of eminent monks were compiled, but this was not the case with regard to *bhikṣuṇīs*.

62. This persecution did not last very long. Although hundreds of thousands of monks and nuns were forced to return to lay life, still many escaped from the persecution. After Emperor Xuanzang (846-859 A.D.), Wuzong’s successor, ascended the throne he ordered that state ordination platforms be built to re-ordain the monks and nuns forced to return to lay status. Therefore, despite this devastating persecution, neither the *bhikṣu* nor the *bhikṣuṇī* lineage was broken.

63. T.49, p. 465c.
64. T.54, p. 252a.
65. Ibid.
66. T.54, p. 238c.
67. Daohai, "Discussion of *Bhikṣuṇī* Ordination and Its Lineage in China: Based on Scriptures of Chinese Vinaya and Historical Facts," p. 5.
68. T.49, p. 463a.
69. T.49, p. 404a.
70. For a partial translation of the *Fozu tongji*, see Jan Yun-hua, *A Chronicle of Buddhism in China 581-960 A.D.* (Calcutta: Viśva-Bharati, 1966).
71. T.49, p. 396b.
72. *Xuzangjing*, Vol.107, p. 94.
73. Ibid., p. 115.
74. Ibid., p. 93.
75. Hongyi, Luxue Yaolue, in *Hongyi Dashih Fazhi*, Vol. 3, p. 1531.
76. Among the *bhikṣuṇī* ordinations held in Taiwan in recent years, a few of them were conferred by both Saṅghas, while the others were by the Bhikṣu Saṅgha only.
77. T.24, no.1455.
78. T.23, no.1443.
79. Tsomo, *Sisters in Solitude*, p. 136.
80. Ibid., p. 140.
81. Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, *A Comparative Study of Bhikkhunī Pātimokkha* (Varanasi: Chaukhambha Orientalia, 1984), p. 74.
82. Ibid, pp. 94-96.
83. T.22, pp.1037b-1038a; T.24, p. 514-515a.
84. T.22, pp. 754c-755a; F. Max Muller, ed., *Sacred Books of the Buddhists*, Vol. 20 (London: Henry Frowde, 1895), p. 385.
85. In the Tibetan translation of the Mūlasarvāstivādin *Bhikṣuṇī Prātimokṣa*, there are 113 *śaikṣa* rules. Tsomo, *Sisters in Solitude*, pp. 120-27.
86. Shi Huimin, "Zhongtu biquni zhuancheng yu Xizang biquni sengtuan zhi chongjian," *Journal of the Center for Buddhist Studies*, National Taiwan University, Vol. 3, 1998, p. 12.
87. W. Pachow, "A Comparative Study of the *Prātimokṣa*," In *Sino-Indian Studies* 4:2 (1955) 69.
88. Before the Buddha entered *parinirvāna*, he told Ānanda that "the lesser and minor rules may be abolished." Horner, *The Book of the Discipline*, Vol. 5, p. 398.
89. Due to political tensions between Communist China and Tibet, it is unlikely, though not impossible that both sides will consider cooperating on this religious issue. Thus, the *bhikṣuṇīs* in Taiwan are probably the best choice for the Tibetan tradition. Besides, the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha in Taiwan is now very strong and vital.
90. Tibetan *bhikṣus* can also choose to confer the full ordination only once, and wait for twelve years until the Tibetan *bhikṣuṇīs* become qualified to conduct the dual ordination in conjunction with Tibetan *bhikṣus*.
91. The same logic can apply to the *śrāmaṇerikā* and *śikṣamāṇā* ordinations. Until Tibetan *bhikṣuṇīs* are available, the Bhikṣu Saṅgha can legitimately give the ordinations to Tibetan nuns.







Precepts at Enshoji: The Rules of a Seventeenth-Century Japanese *Amadera*

Gina Cogan

In 1642 in Kyoto, Japan, a woman named Ume no miya took the tonsure. At the age of 22, she had already been married and separated, and even during her marriage, she had aspired to become a nun. Ume no miya, who took the religious name Bunchi, was the eldest daughter of Emperor Gomizunō. This ruler, already retired by the time of his daughter's tonsure, was devoted to Buddhism. Bunchi, as she now was called, was able to attend the lectures given by the monks he invited, and to visit and correspond with those among her aunts and elder relatives who were nuns. As a princess, she had the economic resources to build a small monastic establishment on the grounds of Shōgakuin, one of the emperor's palaces relatively distant from the city center, and to bring other women with her to become nuns.

Bunchi lived from 1619 to 1697, and spent 56 of her 78 years as a nun and the abbess of Enshōji, the convent she founded. Despite describing herself as having a languid character and a constitution prone to illness, she was remarkably energetic and prolific in a variety of fields. She produced Buddhist painting and sculpture, wrote both Chinese and Japanese-style poetry, was an accomplished calligrapher, and often served as the head officiant in the ceremonies performed by nuns of imperial and aristocratic families.

Among Bunchi's writings are a number of works pertaining to Buddhist monastic precepts. Throughout her career, Bunchi had an abiding concern with strict practice, defined as strictly following both the precepts with which nuns were ordained, and the supplementary rules intended to regulate the daily life of the convent. This interest developed in part through her contact with the

Rinzai Zen monk Isshi Bunshu (1608-46). He had been invited to lecture at the court by Gomizunō, and he served as Bunchi's preceptor at her ordination. He was prominent in the "precept-keeping Zen" movement associated with Myōshinji, a Zen temple in Kyoto that counts Enshji as one of its branch temples/convents.

The nuns of Enshōji valued Bunchi's writings and carefully preserved them. Her work and all the records of the convent show the religious, economic, cultural, political, and day-to-day lives of her and her community during the seventeenth century. This paper focuses on one of Bunchi's central precept-related works, the *Fumon san no ki*, to investigate how Bunchi envisioned ideal practice for the Enshōji nuns and how she developed her thinking on the centrality of the *bodhisattva* precepts of the *Bonmōkyō*, or *Sūtra of Brahma's Net*. I hope this will add to our understanding of the practice of nuns of the past. I think that it is absolutely crucial to understand that Buddhist monastic precepts were used in many different ways throughout history, and that there were nuns who successfully, innovatively, and imaginatively ran communities and started traditions that we can draw on today.

The text at hand, the *Fumon san no ki*, or *Record of the Mountain of the Universal Gate*, was written in 1688. The title of the text comes from the name Bunchi gave Enshōji's final location, in Nara: Fumon san, or Universal Gate Mountain. This, in turn, refers to the twenty-fifth chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra*, "The Universal Gate of Bodhisattva Kanzeon" (*Kanzeon bosatsu fumon*). Bunchi was 69 years old when she wrote the *Fumon san no ki* and she died nine years later, spending these years in retirement at a sub-temple. This work is a history of Enshōji and a set of guidelines for the future, but it can also be read as an autobiography and as a will. The admonishment or exhortation section of the *Fumon san no ki* can be seen as an overview of the general mission of the convent, concerning itself with the selection of abbesses, the proper rituals to be performed, and the proper texts to be read.

It is important to note that the *Fumon san no ki* largely consists of Bunchi's self-presentation as autobiography; consequently it is crucial to read it critically and not take everything written in it as true. For the present, though, I will treat it as Bunchi's vision of herself and her community, and will bracket questions of reliability. However, I will add supplementary information, such as dates, as needed to fill in the picture Bunchi presents. I will quote from my translation of this work in what follows.

Bunchi begins this record with a very humble self-introduction. The text opens: "For no good reason, I entered the empty gate [of Buddhism], with no ability whatsoever, a thoroughly foolish person, a bald-pated nun." She briefly summarizes the 16 years she spent at Enshōji in Kyoto, before giving the reason for the move to Nara. Shūgakuin, she says, was too close to the capital for her

to practice seriously, as it was a very busy and distracting environment. She had lived at Shūgakuin until 1656, having moved there in 1640, immediately after her tonsure at the age of 22.

Bunchi then recounts the process of finding an appropriate location, informing the reader that Kasuga daimoyojin, the great Kasuga deity, came to her in a dream to tell her where to search. When her search proved ineffective, Bunchi had a second dream that directed her further. She was also assisted by her uncle, Songaku, a prince who had become the abbot of Ichijin in Nara and who was familiar with the area, an indication that, while Nara was remote from the capital, it was a religious center in its own right, and that her contact with the Buddhist intellectual community continued after the move. It is also an indication of the close relationship she enjoyed with many of her family members.

The historical segment of the story ends after she has set up her initial convent in Nara. Finding it too small for the community to practice effectively, she moved a few miles away. Having described the establishment of Enshōji in its permanent location, Bunchi proceeds to outline the foundations of Enshōji's philosophy. She writes:

Imitating a few of the rules of a Zen temple, I composed and decided on a collection of rules appropriate to a place of Zen. In accord with the rule revealing the design of the Buddhas and ancestors, I do not want to cause you to lose your human forms under your monastic robes. One by one, keeping in mind the round of birth and death and the greatness of the workings of Buddhas, day and night, making clear what has already been accomplished, practicing pure practices, training seriously, not wasting time idly – all this is sufficient for one to be called my Dharma heir.

Now, having encountered the precept guidelines set by Kokan Kokushi, I deeply revere them. Inaugurating the great *bodhisattva* precepts on this mountain, I want to make these standards last forever.

Bunchi ends the first section of the narrative with Enshōji firmly established in its final location. Immediately thereafter, she states its most fundamental characteristic: Enshōji is a Zen temple with Zen rules. She then links this place to a cosmic, pan-Buddhist past and present by calling on the great design of the Buddhas and ancestors, i.e., the Zen ancestors (a gender-neutral term in Japanese) who have transmitted the Dharma. In this way, she does not simply place the particularities of the practice of the community of nuns at Enshōji in

the larger Buddhist context, but also indicates that their practice is in accord with this design. The statement that she does not want the nuns to lose their human forms under their robes is puzzling, but tentatively one might say that she wants them to practice fully as human beings. She then outlines some of the characteristics of one who is worthy to be her heir, the first indication that we have that she was linking this document to the future.

The pivot between past and future is even clearer in the next statement above. Bunchi cites the famous Zen precept text, the *Zen kai ki* by Kokan Shiren (1278-1346), a monk of the late Kamakura period, and declares her aspiration to make the great *bodhisattva* precepts last forever on her mountain. The *bodhisattva* precepts were common to the different schools of Mahāyāna Buddhism in Japan, but here Bunchi is discussing them as Zen precepts, or precepts appropriate for her Zen convent, and, indeed, the best form of precepts available. Kokan Shiren had said in the *Zen kai ki* that these precepts could be differentiated from what he called the *śrāvaka* precepts, namely the Vinaya precept tradition, because whereas the *śrāvaka* could be broken once they were taken, if one transgressed one of the *bodhisattva* precepts, one was still a child of the Buddha. Bunchi's work, as well as Kokan Shiren's, clearly shows the multiplicity of precept traditions in Japan. The Vinaya precepts were well-known and used by some schools, but since they were not the only set of precepts, or even the most important set, it was acceptable to subordinate them to one's preferred tradition and to critique them.

In the *Fumon san no ki*, Bunchi follows her statement of respect for Kokan Shiren and aspiration to establish the *bodhisattva* precepts permanently at Enshōji with an account of the action she took to ensure this. She writes that in 1680 she led a 35-day repentance ritual. This period of intense practice was capped by a *bodhisattva* ordination ceremony at Enshōji. Bhikṣu Unsho, a precept master from the area, was invited to preside at the ordination. After noting this, Bunchi says:

Then in the year 1688, in the fall, on the twenty-fourth day of the eighth month, for the first time I inaugurated a platform for the *bodhisattva* precepts, and administered those precepts to the whole assembly. From now on, through all future generations of abbesses, the senior nuns and their associates will transmit this administration of precepts for the benefit of those in the future, holding and breaking the precepts, enjoining and forbidding actions, memorizing and chanting them, explaining their meaning, holding precepts in a pure way, not being dyed in the bonds of the world, I am sure that together will achieve the highest way.

I have not yet been able to find corroborating evidence for the existence of this platform, but it is also mentioned in a biography of Bunchi, written by her younger colleague, the monk Chimyū Jōin. However, this biography relied heavily on Bunchi's account of her own life, so an outside source is still necessary.

For the moment, we can say that this marks the peak of Bunchi's concern with proper ordination and precept-holding at Enshōji. She praised Bhikṣu Unsho's precept-giving by saying that henceforth there would be no lack in the monthly *fusatsu*. The term *fusatsu* refers to the periodic (biweekly) *upōsatha*, or precept assembly, where monks and nuns met to recite their transgressions, and lay men and women can take the eight precepts. It can be concluded, then, that for Bunchi, the primacy of the *bodhisattva* precepts did not preclude valuing the precept-related rituals derived from the Vinaya and the early Indian monastic tradition, despite Kokan's placement of these precepts as lower in the precept hierarchy. The relation of the two traditions in her work is a topic that demands future research.

That Bunchi built an ordination platform is highly significant. First, it indicates that she wanted to ensure not only that the precepts were administered properly to the nuns of Enshōji, but that future abbesses could perform the ceremony, thereby accomplishing her goal of permanently establishing the *bodhisattva* precepts at Enshōji, long after her own death. Bunchi had close relationships with other monks of her time who felt that precepts were important, such as Isshi, mentioned above, and Unsho, the monk who was invited to the culmination of the *shōsen* in 1680. He is called a *biku*, the Japanese transliteration of the Sanskrit term *bhikṣu*, and was also known by the title “*risshi*,” or precept teacher. Thus, Bunchi could have left the ordination of her nuns in the hands of monks she trusted, considering that she had no problem inviting monks to grant the precepts to her nuns.

But she did not. Perhaps she feared that monks of the future would not be as conscientious as the ones she knew. Perhaps she wanted this ritual, so central to the life of a new nun and the community she entered, to be in the hands of the women themselves. Bunchi was also concerned with the proper expression of hierarchical relationships and it might also be possible to conclude that she felt the abbess of Enshōji ought to be able to perform all the rituals the nuns of the community would have to do. This would ensure not only that the rituals were done well, but that the abbess was fulfilling her role as the top of the Enshōji hierarchy in all respects.

Second, her establishment of an ordination platform indicated that Bunchi felt free to do what she felt necessary as abbess of Enshōji. I do not know what the reaction of the monastic community was to this development, but given her continued good relations with the monks she knew, it is hard to imagine them

being critical. It might be that Bunchi's status as princess gave her the clout to enact her vision of nuns' independent ordination. Or it might be that the multiplicity of precept traditions in Japan left plenty of room for innovation and individual traditions. I think it was the latter, given the validity through Japanese history of self-ordination and other individual practices that enabled Bunchi as a nun to follow her ideals of strict practice in this concrete way.

Bunchi died without having found a successor; her two preferred candidates died in childhood. However, one of her female relatives, an adult woman who was already a nun at another convent, stepped in and Enshōji survived. It is still an active convent in the south of Nara, and preserves Bunchi's writings and her unique style of chanting precepts, among other things. This paper has only touched very briefly and superficially on the role of precepts in Bunchi's practice, and has completely ignored the wide range of her other religious activities. Still, it seems clear that, for Bunchi, devotedly enacting the *bodhisattva* precepts was the path to the highest way in Buddhism.







Bridging Generations





Elder Care Programs Unifying Generations: The Case of Ilsan Elder Welfare Center in Korea

Neungin Sunim

The Korean government, which has achieved a national per capita income of \$10,000, was determined to support social welfare programs full-scale in the 1990s. Even though social welfare programs for children, the aged, and the disabled were in place before the 1970s, related laws have continued to develop up to the present time. In academic circles in Korea, social welfare programs that looked toward the future began to take shape after the 1990s. According to data collected in 2001 by the Korean Statistical Bureau, the number of aged citizens in Korea reached approximately 3.45 million, which represents 7.4 percent of the total population. It is estimated that this figure will reach 14.3 percent by 2022. This marks the beginning of an aging society. Therefore, government social welfare policies on the aged are developing very rapidly.

The Korean government maintains a policy of supporting the social welfare system, but encourages the positive participation of private organizations. Therefore, social welfare organizations have priority in obtaining rights to administer all social welfare facilities. Accordingly, in December, 2001, there were 251 organizations administering social welfare programs, including social welfare corporations, non-profit organizations (NGOs), and educational foundations. After the 1990s, religious corporations run by Buddhists, Protestant Christians, and Catholics were on the increase; which indicates that religious bodies will continue to actively participate in and maintain social welfare programs. In addition, there are 1,226 social welfare facilities operating

that are supported by the government. If non-authorized facilities are included, the number is about 1800. Of the 317 Buddhist facilities that exist, 78 are organizations related to social welfare, including facilities for children's welfare, elder care, women's welfare, and medical welfare. Around 30 facilities are managed by *bhikṣuṇīs*, most of whom are graduates of the Buddhist Social Welfare Department at Joongang Saṅgha University.

Educational Programs at Joong-Ang Saṅgha University of the Chogye Order

The founding ideology of Joongang Saṅgha University is the education of Buddhist monastics who can heal social conflicts and the sufferings of sentient beings. In addition, the university takes as its goal the creative development of the Korean Buddhist tradition through the study of Buddhism and related sciences, emphasizing practical methods and deepening the national spirit. The university was first authorized as an educational institution on February 27, 1990, with an initial enrollment of 120 students (60 in the Department of Buddhist Studies and 60 in the Buddhist Social Welfare Department). The Ministry of Education approved professional training programs to accommodate 30 monastics in each department, including the newly added Sūtra Translation Department and Buddhist Social Propagation Department. Between 1990 and February 2002, the Buddhist Social Welfare Department produced 362 trained experts. Currently, there are 318 Buddhist nuns among the graduates, most of whom obtained the first degree license in social welfare. At present there are 110 monastic students in the Department of Buddhist Social Welfare, of whom 61 are Buddhist nuns.

Specialized Training Courses at Dongguk University

The founding principle of Dongguk University is the embodiment of an ideal world where all beings are trusted, respected, and educated. Building character with wisdom and compassion for both nature and humanity is the foundation of its Buddhist spirit. In 1989, a Social Welfare Department was established at Dongguk University's Kyongju campus. This department has produced 451 graduates, including 10 Buddhist monks, 15 nuns, 388 laywomen, and 113 laymen. Currently, there are four nuns and four monks among 220 students.

In 1991 a Buddhist Graduate School for Buddhist Social Welfare with a separate Department of Social Welfare was established to train professionals. From October 1993 to February 2002, 19 monks and 11 nuns had obtained master's degrees with a major in Social Welfare. There are now 17 Buddhist monastics attending the school and two more monks and four nuns obtain

master's degrees in October 2003. Most graduates fill important posts in the Chogyae Sect or serve as abbots/abbesses of temples. All of them are contributing to the development of Buddhism and working in different areas to liberate sentient beings in society.

Lotus Village (Yonkotmaeul) as a Social Welfare Organization

The founding objective of Lotus Village (Yonkotmaeul) is to provide quality medical service without creating economic burdens. The ideal living situation after retirement would provide a healthy life for senior citizens who have been deserted by family and society, while developing an ethical spirit with the idea of “respecting elders and doing our filial duty.” In addition, the organization will initiate a campaign to encourage a culture of senior citizens’ increased participation in society – the embodiment of a society where all generations cooperate, respect the aged, and are socialized to fulfill their filial duties. The vision includes social development programs for community social welfare and elder care.

The main activities of Lotus Village will be:

- Establishing and managing homes for the aged and nursing homes
- Managing the operation of free hospitals for the aged
- Initiating social welfare centers, including centers for the aged
- Managing programs in temples for the spiritual welfare of the aged
- Establishing training centers for “respecting elders and doing our filial duty,” such as the Hyo Cultural Center
- Home care services for the elderly
- Projects to study the problems of aging
- Community social welfare activities
- Social welfare projects for children in the home
- Managing homes for the aged
- Managing day care centers
- Managing an association for nursing personnel
- Initiating projects to encourage a culture of elder care
- Managing related organizations.

Programs for the Aged that Unite the Generations at Ilsan Elder Welfare Center

There are approximately 108 facilities for the aged in Korea. General social welfare centers became nationwide in June 2002. At present, the Ilsan Elder Welfare Center is managed by Lotus Village, a social welfare organization dedicated to implementing management training programs and recreational programs for the aged. Improved management can benefit the aged by treating

psychological issues, such as loneliness. Symptoms, such as feelings of identity loss, often occur among the elderly when they become isolated and social interactions decrease. Because the aged population is rapidly increasing, various social problems among the aged are also increasing. Support for social welfare administration and program development can help create solutions to these problems.

Programs to strengthen family participation are also vital. Therefore, social welfare programs for the aged and management programs should emphasize programs to unify family members, with special attend paid to the third generation, so that families will not need to utilize programs for the aged. In addition to activating the third generation, unifying programs can play an important role in dealing with the problems of a rapidly increasing population of senior citizens. In addition to addressing these problems, programs to unite the generations will help prevent the dismantling of families and promote healthy family functioning, thereby contributing greatly to social stability.

Some of the important programs that have been organized so far are:

- Lake Cultural Festival: A large festival that brings senior citizens together with people in the community.
- Hanmaeum (“One Heart”) Athletic Games: A family harmony program that brings family members and the aged together through sports.
- Group presentations: Sharing educational materials from special activities with families.
- Showcasing proud families: A get-together of three generations centering on the aged.
- Community training programs: Senior citizens teach summer vacation programs to youth, children, and housewives.
- Volunteer activities for each generation: Volunteer activities of youth, children, and housewives in the community enable the aged to become managers and supporters of the welfare center for the aged, and provide a meeting space for intra-generational programs to understand the social welfare of the aged.

Here I have briefly introduced the content of certain Buddhist nuns’ social welfare activities. Education programs and specialized training courses are offered at Joongang Saṅgha University and Dongguk University. Programs for the aged are operated by Buddhist social welfare organizations, such as the Programs for the Aged that Unite the Generations at the Ilsan Elder Welfare Center operated by Lotus Village. Community activities organized by Buddhist nuns are expanding and getting good results in the community. Through these activities, Buddhists gain the admiration of society.

Besides these social welfare activities, Buddhist nuns are participating and playing leading roles in the activities of NGOs, ranging from environmental protection projects to traditional temple activities for lay Buddhists, such as lessons in vegetarian cuisine. Nowadays, many lay Buddhists are paying serious attention to dying patients and many general hospitals are recognizing that the temple compound is a spiritual refuge for patients. In addition, Buddhist nuns have become leading pioneers in various fields in society. In the near future, more social welfare activities organized by Buddhist nuns can be expected in Korea.





Reaching All Generations: Buddhist Outreach in Taiwan

Elise Anne DeVido

Since 1949, institutional Buddhism has seen tremendous growth in Taiwan, especially since the economic take-off in the 1970s and then, in the mid-1980s, the end of martial law and development of democratic government and civil society in Taiwan. According to the most recent government statistics, the number of Buddhists in Taiwan has increased from 800,000 followers in 1983 to around 3.67 million Buddhists today, out of Taiwan's overall population of 22 million. It is also vital to note that the total number of monks and nuns in Taiwan is 30,000, 75 percent of whom are nuns. This is an astounding and unique phenomenon in world Buddhism.¹

These figures are even more astonishing when we realize that, historically speaking, the major religion in Taiwan has not been Buddhism, but rather the polytheistic, syncretic religion known as the "Chinese folk religion." This folk religion is a mixture of ancestor worship, worship of the Bodhisattva Guanyin; worship of Mazu, the folk goddess of the sea; worship of the Wang Ye gods who protect communities against disease and disaster; worship of the Eternal Mother, the Earth God, the Kitchen God, plus a whole pantheon of gods and heroes from the Daoist tradition. Even today, most people in Taiwan are *not* officially and regularly affiliated with a formal, organized religion, be it Buddhism, Daoism, Christianity, Islam, or some other smaller sects and New Age Religions. Many people in Taiwan, especially in urban areas are either completely non-religious or undertake certain rituals from time to time, according to the Chinese almanac and on various holidays according to the Chinese lunar calendar. Of course, these are in addition to the rituals

of ancestor worship. Common petitions to the gods and goddesses include prayers for health, wealth, success in examinations, to beget children (especially sons), and for protection against accidents and harm. Local gods and goddesses are also involved in funeral and mourning rituals.²

In the last twenty years, however, as noted above, Taiwan has seen a dramatic revival in institutional Buddhism, primarily a mixture of Pure Land and Chan, centered around temples and monasteries of fully ordained nuns and monks who propagate the Dharma. Nuns and monks have worked together with their diligent and generous lay followers to create the Pure Land on Earth. This means that Buddhism in Taiwan not only guides the Taiwanese as they ponder spiritual, philosophical, and ethical questions, but Buddhism in Taiwan has promoted the values of community involvement and volunteerism. Buddhist organizations have fostered a concern for the commonweal, for the greater good of society, that is relatively new to the traditionally family-oriented Chinese culture of Taiwan.³

Taken as a whole, Buddhist organizations in Taiwan are rich in human talent, property, and resources, and Buddhism is the fastest growing religion in Taiwan today. In addition to activities in Taiwan, "They are also building an international network of Buddhist organizations that embraces not only the Mahayana traditions but spreads out to countries in the Theravāda tradition, in a conscious effort to strengthen the roots of the Buddhist world view in contemporary society."⁴

Secrets of Success

So, what is the secret of the Taiwan Buddhists' success? There are many reasons, including political, economic, and cultural factors, but here I would like to focus on how Taiwan Buddhism has proselytized and attracted lay followers from across the spectrum of generations. Lay followers can be grouped into the following four categories: children, high school/college students; adults, and senior citizens.

Since Taiwan is a group-oriented society, Buddhists here naturally focus on methods of group mobilization, and use proselytizing traditions from both within and without Buddhism. The former include large-scale Buddhist gatherings, such as the celebration of the Buddha's birthday and the Pu Du (Universal Salvation) rituals for the souls of the dead held in August. In addition, they include Buddhist lectures and sermons; one-day, three-day, and seven day retreats; Chan retreats; lay ordination ceremonies; pilgrimages; free publications; and classes on Buddhist teachings for all levels.

Buddhist organizations also adopt methods and forms that are familiar to people in Taiwan from their schools and clubs, including group-spirit rallies,

night schools, fairs, auctions, and formal degree programs. Buddhists have adopted methods and forms from Boy and Girl Scout groups like summer and winter camps, and various hobby and personal enrichment classes geared to different age groups. Buddhists stress how much they have learned from the Christian groups who have much experience in organizing camps, retreats, classes of all kinds, and charity drives.

For children, Buddhists hold camps and teach the Dharma through cartoons and picture books, singing, games, dancing, storytelling, and art projects. For the youth, besides the college student clubs and summer and winter meditation camps that many Buddhist groups organize, here we must note the work of the Chinese Young Buddhist Association that specifically targets students and young adults. In addition, the Chinese Buddhist Temple Association not only serves as an umbrella organization for temples throughout Taiwan, but also organizes the following:

- Seminars on how to integrate Buddhist philosophy into one's daily life
- Dharma teaching programs in jails and detention centers
- Career development workshops for college students
- Lecture series on the problems and concerns of teenagers such as how to deal with school and examination pressures; and how to develop communication skills and one's so-called "Emotional Quotient" (EQ)
- Lectures series on the concerns and needs of single parent households and especially the effects on the children.

These are just some of the activities of the Chinese Buddhist Temple Association.⁵

Turning to another generation group, for adults there are a wide variety of activities as mentioned earlier. The Ciji (Tzuchi) Buddhist Foundation has, for example, a Men's League, a Teachers' Association composed of teachers and professors from all over Taiwan, and has established Ciji Student Clubs in universities across Taiwan.⁶ For senior citizens, besides classes on the Dharma, and classes in adult education and hobbies, Buddhist groups visit ill and bedridden elders who may not have family members to care for them, as was previously the rule in Chinese tradition.

Recently, one topic of great interest in Taiwan is on dying with dignity, hospice care, death, and the afterlife. Buddhist groups hold classes and seminars to discuss these sensitive issues. Traditionally, the topics of dying and death were taboo and not to be discussed openly, if at all. Indicative of these very recent developments are Fo Kuang Shan Monastery's Graduate Institute of Life and Death Studies at their Nan Hua University, and the Chinese Society

for Life and Death Studies, a private association comprised of academics and funerary professionals founded in 1999.

In addition to all these activities, Buddhist temple organizations hold scholarly conferences, art exhibitions, and concerts that enrich and elevate Taiwan cultural life. Buddhist organizations reach out to all generations through their own newspapers, television stations and programs, websites, magazines, music, and videotapes. Thus, Buddhist outreach in Taiwan reflects fully the high level of education that the Taiwanese have received over the past 50 years, and also the access to technology and information, and the freedom of the press that the Taiwanese have enjoyed especially since the 1980s. Of special note is a comprehensive website in Chinese called “Buddhism City,” which is created and maintained by the Pu Tuo Culture and Education Foundation.⁷ This website includes the following categories of information: Buddhist news; Buddhist biographies; an online Buddhist Discussion Forum; an online collection of *sūtras*, Buddhist texts, and mantras; Buddhist organizations and temples; Buddhist art and artifacts; individual webpages; Buddhist charity and philanthropic works; Buddhist media and publishing houses; a guide to vegetarian restaurants; educational information about the Tibetan tradition; and information about Buddhist rituals. A section called “Hot Topics” discusses such issues as “Talking about Gender Equality in Buddhism.” This website also lists information about Buddhist activities and events in mainland China, the United States, and Japan and other Asian nations. Such a website contributes greatly to the unity and maturity of Buddhism in Taiwan.

Concluding Reflections

No one can deny or denigrate the great achievements and contributions that Buddhist groups have made to society and culture in Taiwan over the last 20 years. With such spectacular growth, Buddhism has contributed greatly to the spiritual, emotional, and intellectual lives of the Taiwanese. Yet I perceive some difficulties related to Buddhist outreach in Taiwan.

First, the great challenge for all religions, but perhaps especially Buddhism remains: How can the need for individual study, meditation, reflection, discernment, silence, solitude, non-attachment be protected in the midst of all the demands, confusion, violence, and noisy materialism of overly-developed societies? More specifically, how can silence and reflection be maintained when one is fully committed to a Buddhist group and the group’s mission and busy secular activities? However laudable and beneficial to society, one’s own study and cultivation may be neglected or even forgotten. There is so much social action, but is there also a corresponding measure of reflection and discernment?

Second, related to the previous concern are additional questions: What is particularly Buddhist about these lay organizations? Have some Buddhist temples and lay organizations become too commercialized? Do they ironically run the risk of fragmentation into special-interest groups competing for survival in the feel-good, fast-food-style cultural market of today's society?

Third, as Benoit Vermander has written in his article, "Religions in Taiwan Today," in recent years, "Taiwanese Buddhism has gained an unprecedented social audience and independence. However, the proliferation of communities gathered around competing spiritual masters still makes them prone to political manipulation."⁸ There is no state or official religion in Taiwan; freedom of religion is a constitutional right of all citizens, and all religious groups are private non-government organizations. But it is indeed disturbing to observe the factionalism and competition that exists among some Buddhist organizations in Taiwan. The term in Chinese is called "mountain-top-ism" (*shantou zhuyi*), meaning that certain Buddhist organizations have virtually become fiefdoms unto themselves, and are reluctant to cooperate and share resources and talents with each other.⁹ Happily, there are also groups that endeavor to unite and form positive alliances among different Buddhist groups, for example, the Buddhist Association of the Republic of China (Taiwan), the Chinese Young Buddhist Association in Taiwan, the Chinese Buddhist Temple Association as mentioned above, and the World Religions Museum in Taipei, established by Ling Jiu Shan Buddhist Monastery.

Fourth, Buddhist ethics, which espouse non-violence, compassion, wisdom, non-attachment, and a "skillful means" approach to problem-solving seem especially apposite to solve today's ills. Yet, "the social critique developed by Taiwanese Buddhism remains rather cautious at present..."¹⁰ Can Buddhist groups in Taiwan not speak out more strongly against the Taiwanese companies and government policies that have contributed to pollution and environmental degradation of Taiwan? In the future, perhaps Buddhist groups in Taiwan can do even more to help the underprivileged non-Chinese aboriginal groups in Taiwan, to criticize the sex industry, and to support the anti-nuclear power movement or the brand-new miniscule movement to abolish the death penalty. Perhaps they can participate more fully in the life-and-death struggle against terrorism, militarism, and violence in the world today.

Obviously these are extremely complex and serious problems that require long-term vision and thoughtful planning. The four concerns I have mentioned require the Buddhist groups in Taiwan to unite their hearts, minds, and resources, and cooperate not only with each other but also reach out to Buddhist groups worldwide. The Dharma transcends attachments to individual egos, masters, groups, nations, and one's own Buddhist tradition. This may be the most difficult challenge of all.

NOTES

1. Statistics provided by the Civil Affairs Department, Ministry of the Interior, Republic of China, December 2000. For more on Buddhist monastics, see Elise A. DeVido, "The Infinite Worlds of Taiwan's Buddhist Nuns," *Buddhist Women and Social Justice: Ideals, Challenges, and Achievements*, ed. Karma Lekshe Tsomo (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2004), pp. 219-31. So far the only monograph in English on the history of Buddhism in Taiwan is Charles B. Jones, *Buddhism in Taiwan: Religion and the State, 1660-1990* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999).
2. For a succinct summary of Taiwan's religious landscape, see Daniel L. Overmyer, *Religions of China: The World as a Living System* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1986), pp. 51-54, 103-106.
3. An excellent introduction to the Buddhist renaissance in Taiwan, see the special issue devoted to this topic of the *Free China Review* 44:12 (December 1994): 1-35.
4. Benoit Vermander, "Religions in China Today," *China News Analysis*, 1538-9, p. 4.
5. See *Chinese Buddhist Temple Association: General Introduction* (Kaohsiung: Chinese Buddhist Temple Association, 1999).
6. The most complete guide to the missions and works of the Ciji Compassion Relief Foundation can be found on their website: www.tzuchi.org.
7. <http://www.buddhismcity.net>.
8. *China News Analysis*, 1538-39, p. 12.
9. See Wang Shunmin, "Dangdai Taiwan fojiao bianqian zhi kaocha (A Study of Change in Contemporary Taiwanese Buddhism)" in *Zhonghua foxue xuebao* 8 (July 1995): 315-342; and Xu Shengxiong, "Zhongguo fojiao zai Taiwan zhi fazhanshi (History of the development of Chinese Buddhism in Taiwan)" in *Zhonghua foxue yanjiu* 2 (1998): 289-98.
10. Vermander, "Religions in Taiwan Today," p. 12.







Betwixt and Between: Communicating the Dharma Across Generations

Renlang Shih

In this paper, I approach the topic of bridging generations from the perspective of one who is both a traditionally trained Buddhist nun and, at the same, a Western-educated woman with a Ph.D. in Buddhist Studies. In this sense, like many people of my generation, I combine two perspectives, one traditional and one modern (or Western). For me, the traditional perspective is more associated with religious practice, specifically Buddhist practice, whereas the Western perspective is more associated with knowledge and academic training. Here I will discuss the question of bridging generations from the perspective of Buddhist practice, because that is the essential foundation of my life as a Buddhist nun, whereas the intellectual approach is to expand my knowledge and understanding of Buddhism. Of these two perspectives, the traditional and the modern, it is the traditional way of practice that seems unchangeable, because it is a reliable path to achieving the main goal of Buddhist practice, which is to become an enlightened Buddha. This training takes time. It requires patience, calmness, compassion, and insight. Observing the precepts and practicing the six perfections (*pāramitās*) is the basic training to achieve enlightenment. Still, the method of teaching and training can be flexible.

Intellectual training may not seem closely related to the aim of achieving enlightenment, but it is an expedient means of understanding what Buddhism is, as viewed from a broader perspective. For instance, each of the different Buddhist traditions has its own history, system of thought, and method of training. We do not need to know all of them in order to become enlightened.

We only need one. But, as scholars, we need to be familiar with as many of these traditions as possible in order to teach Buddhism well.

Another aspect of communicating Dharma across generations concerns the teacher/disciple relationship. Each generation has its own unique character, influenced by its particular social, historical, and cultural conditions. The difference between a traditional master, such as my master, Ven. Shig Hiu Wan, and a teacher of the younger generation, such as myself, is not great. It is mostly a difference in the degree of understanding and level of spiritual development. My master was also a different generation from her master, Ven. Tanxu, the 43rd Patriarch of the Tiantai School in China. Even though she seems very traditional to us today, she was a pioneer in her own time. In that generation, during the 1950s, she was unique in being the only female disciple of this famous Tiantai master. Moreover, she was unique in being an internationally famous artist, rather than a traditional Buddhist. As an artist, painter, poet, writer, philosopher, and educator, Ven. Shig Hiu Wan was a pioneer in many fields. When she began teaching at the graduate level in 1972, she was also the first ordained nun to teach at a university in Taiwan. She broke through many social and cultural boundaries, and was successful in her struggle because of her own unique background.

When I first met Ven. Shig Hiu Wan, I was not a Buddhist and had very little knowledge about Buddhism. My classmate forced me to accompany her when she went to visit the master, and I was really very hesitant to see a highly cultivated Buddhist practitioner. I was afraid that she would see through me, because I was a very ordinary worldly person, and could not imagine how I could achieve anything in the Buddhist realm. But when I met the master and listened to a talk she gave about calm abiding (*samathā*) and insight (*vipassanā*), and had a chance to talk with her personally, I felt unexplainably delighted. The second impression I got was seeing how busy she was working for others, while I was busy working only for myself. I decided to devote some time to help her, to assist her in her work. As I did that, I got an even deeper impression of her calm and compassion. I worked for entire days without speaking and she never really spoke to me either, but that was a very powerful experience for me. That stimulated me to think about many different questions and sparked my interest in Buddhism.

As I stayed with her, I saw that she could work all day and all night without sleep, whereas I got tired and frustrated, because I was not able to meet her expectations. It never occurred to me to leave, but I was aware of the vast difference between her capabilities and my own. For example, she is a gifted artist, poet, and writer, but no matter how hard I tried, I could not become a painter, poet, or writer. At first, I thought I should learn everything she had to teach me, but eventually I realized that I would never be her. I gave up trying

to be what I was not and decided to focus on Buddhist practice instead. I began to view all the work I did for her as part of the training. I could not become a painter, but I could serve her as she painted and listen as she lectured. In the process, I learned patience and also learned something about Buddhist art. Totally apart from her many accomplishments, it was her personal qualities as a Buddhist master that most inspired me.

My master was very strict with me and never compromised when it came to my deficiencies. Being close to her sometimes made the training even harder, but it was also a great blessing. Maybe because she saw that I had a mind of my own, she never gave me a chance to negotiate, though she always let me express my opinions freely. That was the fresh air in the midst of the stringent training. That made it possible for me to persevere with the training. Many others gave up. They got upset and left, seeing only her strictness and missing the whole point of the training.

The greatest difficulty I faced was when I tried to emulate all her accomplishments. Besides her special gift as an artist, she was also an accomplished meditator and could sit all day without effort, whereas I was in such pain in the beginning, I could hardly sit for an hour. She seemed to be naturally free of all defilements, whereas I still struggled with my desire to visit friends and go shopping. She was such a good master, such a good model. She never engaged in meaningless chatter. I felt embarrassed to share my struggles and my defilements with her, because she seemed totally free of them. So I had to struggle with them myself. Of course, she gave me excellent advice about how to put the teachings into practice, but it was like describing the taste of water or food. Ultimately, I had to struggle with it myself. She was so far ahead in the practice, whereas I was just beginning. I learned that ultimately the practice is a personal matter. Nobody else can practice for us, even the master.

But now I feel very happy, because I can see the whole process very clearly. I worked very hard and struggled so intensely, and I feel that I have taken some steps. I feel much more confident now and feel very happy that I am a Buddhist. I know that I made the right decision to be a practitioner, rather than an artist. Because of my own personal inclinations, I followed my own interests and got a doctorate in Buddhist studies. But I am primarily a Buddhist practitioner. As I follow the teachings of my master, I still have to search for my own particular path, my own way to become enlightened. My new job as a professor, as an administrator communicating with all kinds of people, my own meditation practice, and the whole process of daily life, all contribute to my own insight. This development of awareness and wisdom will ultimately lead to a realization of my own.

When the time comes for me to have disciples of my own, the students will be different and there will also be a difference between my way of teaching

and my master's. Not only will it be a new generation, but also my teaching style will be a result of my own experience. And I will feel confident doing that, because I myself have gone through the whole process of training. The question is: Will the next generation be able to undergo the same process of training that I have? I have been with my master for 30 years now, and I am not sure that this process can be speeded up. For true enlightenment, people need to practice over the long-term, which takes time and patience. The new generation is used to instant gratification and also cannot accept the old teaching style unquestioningly. The world is changing so rapidly, and social conditions and human relationships have shifted so radically, both teachers and disciples have to be very patient, gentle, and flexible. Our teachers have been very patient with us and we were patient with our teachers. Now, to be good teachers, we will need to be patient with our students and the next generation of students will also need to be patient with us. We will need to be patient and understanding, and we also need to uphold certain principles that cannot be compromised. Training is essential to Buddhist practice, for, without it, we will just remain the same and never get out of *samsāra*.

My first goal is to be a practitioner, and, second, a teacher. As the great Tiantai master Zhiyi said, "The more I teach, the fewer people get enlightened." And he went back to the practice. To be a real teacher is to be a model of the goal of achieving enlightenment. We can pass on whatever knowledge and wisdom we have gained, but the next generation will need to achieve the qualities of enlightenment by their own efforts.



Bridging Contemplation and Social Activism

Molini Rai

I would like to introduce the topic of the interface between contemplation and social activism by examining the academic context of Burmese nuns. Contemplation is an investigation of the mental and physical phenomena that constitute the “self.” Contemplation is a method to search for reality in the body and mind, through wisdom based on concentration. By direct and constant observation, we can achieve a greater degree of concentration and knowledge.

Social activism was the main aim of the Buddha. After the first *vassa* (rainy season retreat), the Buddha sent the first group of 60 *arahants* to do “*bahujānā hitāva, bahujānā sukhāva*” work. This phrase means that he directed each of them to go in different directions “for the welfare of all beings, for the peace and happiness for all beings.” From this, it is clear that the Buddha emphasized the well-being of society.

Nuns in Burma follow the same path as the Buddha. They accomplish this intellectually and physically through *metta* (loving kindness) and *cetana* (volition), working for the good of humanity through great personal sacrifice. According to Burmese histories, Burmese nuns were occupied in the realms of both contemplation and social activism. Consequently, the nuns’ physical, spiritual, and verbal actions are very gentle and humble. In Burma, the local worldly language and the monastic language are quite different. The monastics, both monks and nuns, use the very respectful language of the Buddha’s time. For example, monastics always end sentences with the Burmese word “Phaya, phaya,” which means “Buddha, Buddha.”

Contemplation leads to action. Buddhist monastics have the tradition of helping ease the sufferings of humanity through social action. To illustrate this, I would like to describe the work of two nuns, Daw Oo Zun and Daw Khemanandi, who were living examples of contemplation and social activism.

Daw Oo Zun

The concept of maintaining homes for the aged is not a new phenomenon in Burma. Homes for the aged were in existence throughout many royal dynasties. In Mandalay, the capital city of the Myanmar kings, bungalows were built in the four directions to provide shelter to the old, and operating expenses for these shelters were borne by the royal treasury. The Buddhist teachings prescribe looking after the aged as a sacred duty.

The pioneer founder of one such home for the aged was a noblewoman from Mandalay. This woman, named Daw Oo Zun, was born into a family of silk merchants in 1868. Her parents not only brought her up well in the ways of the world, but also initiated her into Buddhist higher learning, morality, and the virtues of charity and philanthropy. Even before the age of 35, she donated funds for a monastery and earned the title “Donor of a Monastery,” which carried high honor and prestige. Many other donations were also credited to her name.

Daw Oo Zun visited the Catholic Home for the Aged Poor in Rangoon during her frequent business tours to the capital city. She was deeply interested with this humanitarian project, which was run by French nuns of the Catholic faith. Daw Oo Zun then contemplated establishing a home for the Buddhist aged. She envisioned the relief that could be extended to the helpless and needy, and was overwhelmed with the joy and satisfaction that would naturally accrue through such meritorious acts of charity.

Daw Oo Zun discussed this noble project both with venerable and highly regarded senior monks of the Saṅgha and also with lay elders. With their encouragement, she succeeded in establishing the first-ever Buddhist Home for the Aged on January 11, 1915, at Mingun, a small town not far from Mandalay. In the beginning, there were only three residents: one grandfather aged 96, and two grandmothers aged 65 and 98. The initial building was just a small thatched hut. In the early months of the project, Daw Oo Zun personally attended to the needs of the three aged people. By that time, she was so totally dedicated to the mission that she donated all her estates and assets for its upkeep. Four substantial buildings, 100,000 kyats in cash, and extensive lands were all entrusted to the Home.

Encouraged by the success of her first home for the aged in Mingun, she expanded her missionary social work activities, opening additional homes at

Thaton in 1923, at Paungde in 1929, at Hninzigone Ward in Rangoon in 1933, and at Pakokku in 1937. At the age of 60, she renounced lay life, became a nun, and took up residence at Paungde Home. In recognition of her humanitarian social service, the British government presented Daw Oo Zun with the title “T.P.S.” (Taingkyo Pyikyo Saung), a title which is conferred upon those who render commendable service for the welfare of human beings. She passed away in 1944 at the age of 76.

At a certain time in history, a person is born into the human world who is instrumental in bridging love, peace, and joy due to her selfless altruism, philanthropy, and loving kindness for all beings on earth. Daw Oo Zun was such a person.

Daw Khemanandi

Daw Khemanandi is one of the most generous nuns in Myanmar. She was born in Mandalay in 1911. Her parents were U Nyan and Daw Pu. Daw Khemanandi became a nun when she was ten years old. In 1958, she established her first school for orphan girls in Taung Oo, which was called Ze Ya Si Ri. In 1963, she established another school for orphans in Mandalay, called Aye Yate Mon, which means “Holy Peace Shadow.” Over 30,000 girls have been raised in these schools, which teach different professional skills, and many girls have graduated over the years.

The schools have very open-minded rules. When the girls graduate, the school never raises any objections regarding their decisions for the future. They never force the girls to become nuns, believing that the decision depends on the girls’ own wishes.

Daw Khemanandi now stays with Daw Nanda Theri. In 2002, she reached the age of 91. She has a large staff and therefore the schools are still running smoothly. Her projects are supported by a committee of generous Burmese donors. In recognition of Daw Khemanandi’s noble activities, the Myanmar Government awarded her the missionary title of Maha Sath Dhamma Zotika Daja on January 4, 1995.

Nuns in Social Welfare

The daily activities of nuns in Burmese nunneries are to rise at 5 am, take part in the morning chanting, cook and eat breakfast, and then meditate and study the Buddhist texts. After classes, in the late afternoon, nuns do manual work around the nunnery. At 6 pm, they again gather for evening chanting and Dhamma discourses. Some nuns are vegetarian and most are always ready to help in every aspect of running the nunneries. Young nuns are under the direct care of their nun teachers. The teacher/disciple relationship is like that of

parent and child. Elder nuns not only teach, but also take care of their novices in many other ways.

The categorization and application of religious honorific titles signifies that Burmese nuns are very much integrated members of the Buddhist community. Aside from running their monastic communities, their social identity is based on their many community welfare activities. The nuns derive their status from association with the monks and from the part they play in enabling the monks to live apart from the world.

One of the best ways for nuns to advance their religious status is through education. Their motivation is only to benefit others and so their efforts to become more educated come straight from the heart. Since they have no selfish motives, they can be a big help to others.







Bridging Value Systems: Ancient & Modern





Maintaining Inner Peace

Bhikkhunī Dhammananda
(*Chatsumarn Kabilsingh*)

Thailand has the highest percentage of Buddhist population of any country in the world. In a population of 62 million Buddhists, there are 300,000 monks and 10,000 *mae chiis* (white-robed nuns). There are also 25,000 Buddhist temples, but there are no fully ordained nuns.

Thailand became an united country for the first time in the thirteenth century C.E. There is evidence of Mahāyāna practice in the land, but officially Thailand is a Theravāda Buddhist country and its lineage comes from Sri Lanka. White-robed *mae chiis* have existed since the Ayudhya period (fourteenth to fifteenth century CE), but fully ordained nuns have never existed there.

In 1920s, a political figure named Narin Klueng supported and introduced the *bhikkhunī* ordination. He set up a temple for *bhikkhunīs* and allowed his own daughters, Sara and Chongdi, to become the first *bhikkhunīs*. However, the two nuns were ordained only by monks. Narin Klueng, the nuns' father, was not only a political figure, but also a strong social critic. He created opposition both in the government and in the Saṅgha. Even King Rama VII was displeased with him. As a result, strongly objections were raised against the *bhikkhunī* ordination, which was seen as his creation. The *bhikkhunīs* were jailed and forced to give up their robes. As a result, in 1928 H. H. the Supreme Patriarch issued an order stipulating that, "Thai monks are not allowed to ordain women either as a *bhikkhunī*, *sikkhāmāna*, or *samānerī*." This order has never been rescinded, so it is still considered to be in effect up to the present day.

The Theravāda tradition emerged from the verdict of the First Council, when the elders decided that they would not add anything new to the body of

the Vinaya, nor would they expunge anything from the Vinaya as it was recited at the First Council. But is not this order of 1928 a new addition? Does it not go against the spirit of Theravāda?

In 1971, Ven. Voramai Kabilsingh, who had led a homeless life since 1956, went to Taiwan and received full ordination at Sung San Temple, becoming the first Thai *bhikkhuni* to be ordained in the Chinese lineage. Her ordained name was Ta Tao Shih. Upon returning to Thailand, she started her own temple, Songdhammakalyani, in Nakhonpathom, which is about 52 km. west of Bangkok. She remained the only fully ordained monastic in her otherwise well-supported temple. The Bhikkhu Saṅgha left her alone, since they regarded her as belonging to the Mahāyāna tradition. She continued her work for more than 30 years.

In 2001, I followed in her footsteps and went to Sri Lanka to receive ordination. I was given the ordained name Dhammananda. When I returned to Thailand, I was invited to appear on three television programs on Channel 5, but the programs were abruptly cancelled for no clear reason. This incident created a stir, making the issue of great interest to the media, who saw it as an injustice and a transgression of the right to freedom of speech. As a newly ordained nun, I had to appear at many other television channels.

Officially the Saṅgha has so far been silent about this case. However, some monks and former monks have expressed strong objections to my ordination, insisting that it is impossible to revive the Theravāda *bhikkhuni* order. They say that the *bhikkhuni* lineage died out in Theravāda tradition and cannot be revived. Thus they completely turn their backs on the Buddha's words.

The Buddha entrusted the Dharma to the four groups of Buddhists, namely, the *bhikkhus*, *bhikkhunīs*, laymen, and laywomen. He trusted that these four groups would study the Dhamma, put it into practice, and defend it against any outsiders who tried to establish false claims. The Buddha also warned that Buddhism would decline if these four groups of Buddhists did not respect the Triple Gem, did not respect meditation and study the discipline and training set forth in the Vinaya (*sikkha*), and did not respect each other.

The Dhamma protects those who practice it with sincere conviction. Once a woman (or a man) is ordained, the true purpose is to try to achieve the spiritual goal. Even though heavy criticism and obstacles from society may appear, an ordained person must always be mindful to maintain inner peace. Otherwise, the purpose of ordination cannot be achieved. With strong commitment to serve the Buddha, one should be able to maintain a peaceful mind.



Bridging Ancient and Modern Value Systems in Nepal

Bhikkhunī Dhammavijaya

The Buddha, the Supremely Awakened One, was born in Nepal. Therefore Nepal is not only famous from a worldly perspective, due to the popularity of Mount Everest at the top of the world, but Nepal is also the ancient homeland of Buddhism. Thousands of princes became *arahants* in Nepal. Five years after the Buddha's enlightenment, his father, King Śuddodana attained *arahantship* and the queen Pajāpati Gotamī, after many attempts, finally received higher ordination and initiated the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha of Nepal.

Over 300 years after the Buddha's death, during the period of King Asoka (273-232 BCE), Nepal was ruled by King Sthunko, the Kirat ruler. His son married King Aśoka's daughter Charumati. She sponsored the construction of Charumati Vihara and established many *stūpas* in the valley. Later, Mahāyāna Buddhism became well-rooted in Nepal, up to the fifteenth century.

When the Brahmanical tradition became dominant in the holy lands of India and Nepal, the celibate monastic tradition seriously declined in Nepal. The long-standing tradition of permanent ordination for monks and nuns collapsed, and Buddhism was practiced by laypeople. Only the tradition of ordaining young men as novices for four days survived continuously in Mahāyāna tradition in Nepal. However, this tradition is not for women.

In the twentieth century, Theravāda Buddhism was re-established in Nepal. Some Nepalese Buddhists were looking for an alternative to the Vajrayāna Buddhist tradition that they had previously followed. They came

into contact with the Mahabodhi Society of India and took ordination. For women, ordination meant that they vowed to observe the ten precepts. After receiving some religious training, they returned to Nepal and tried to spread their reasonable message. They faced stiff opposition from the orthodox Hindu government, however, and for the first 20 years of their mission, suffered harassment, persecution, and exile.

In 1928, the Prime Minister of Nepal summoned a group of Buddhist women to stop them from studying religious books, which, according to the Hindu tradition, were only for male eyes. A woman named Laxminani Tuladhar was the leader of this group. At a time when only two percent of the Nepalese population was literate, she could read not only Newari, but also Nepali and Hindi. She became a widow in her twenties and lost both her children. Her only solace was to follow religion. For several years, she took refuge in the mountains among Tibetan monks and spread the Dhamma among the illiterate womenfolk of Nepal.

In the early 1930s, the first Theravādin monks and nuns returned from India and stayed at Kimdol Vihara near Swayumbhu. Laxminani Tuladhar and her followers started to listen to their sermons. In 1934, Laxminani and five of her companions visited Kushinagara and met Chandramuni Mahasthavira, a Theravāda missionary monk and member of the Mahabodhi Society of India. Chandramuni Mahasthavira managed to send them on to Arakan in Burma. They stayed in Burma and studied the Dhamma with Burmese nuns. Only when they felt they were ready did they shave their heads, exchange their dress for the pink and orange dress of the *thilashin*, and take the ten precepts. Due to their inadequate education and lack of Buddhist books, they were unable to give Dhamma teachings to the lay disciples. Instead, they conducted *pūjās*, told Jataka stories, and counseled the laity regarding family problems.

Meanwhile, the position of the nuns in the community was marginal in comparison with the monks. In the 1940s, a few Nepalese nuns were living in a new nunnery, Tana Bahal in Patna, while most remained at Kimdol. The monks and the government subjected them to malicious gossip and harassment. Several monks were jealous because of the popularity of Laxminani Tuladhar among the lay followers. They successfully pressured the *gurumas* (nuns) into performing the work of domestic servants for them.

After the downfall of the anti-Buddhist Rana regime, Theravādin Buddhists achieved a respected position within Nepalese society. They started expanding and diversifying their community. To this end, they made great efforts to construct *viḥāras*, mostly in the Kathmandu Valley. More than 50 *viḥāras* were constructed during this period, but only a few were nunneries. Laxminani Tuladhar's Dhammacari Nunnery at Kimdol was the largest among the monasteries. This new nunnery soon became a focal point for devout

laywomen, who flocked there for instruction in the Dhamma. Towards the end of her life, the nun Dhammacari expanded her nunneries to include a Dhamma study center during the rainy season. In 1978, at the age of 80, she died, after offering her position as the chief *guruma* of the Theravāda community to a young nun named Dhammawati.

Dhammawati's life history offers a true portrait of the situation of Nepalese nuns. At the age of fourteen, she traveled to Burma in search of religious education. Due to her young age, her parents refused to give her permission to go, so she ran away from home. She walked into Burma illegally, and was arrested. Finally, she got permission to study the Dhamma. For a decade, Dhammawati was the only Nepalese nun studying in Burma, but in 1960 she visited Nepal briefly and arranged for some other young women to be trained at Moulmein Monastery. Returning once again to Burma, she passed the fourth level examinations and received the Dhammacariya, the first Nepalese nun to do this. She was invited to remain in Burma, but decided that her goal was to teach the Dhamma in her own country and she returned to Nepal in 1964.

In Nepal, Dhammawati straightaway set about using her considerable intellectual and organizational skills to educate a new generation in the Dhamma. According to her, everyone, regardless of age, sex or status, should have access to the Dhamma. It was her belief that in Nepal the two highest barriers to this were illiteracy and the lack of vernacular Buddhist materials. She purchased some land in the courtyard of Sri Gha Stupa and, with the help of her well-wishers, constructed a small nunnery and named it Dharmakirti Vihara. Here they taught reading, writing, arithmetic, and Buddhism for which Ven. Dhammawati herself began producing materials. Due to her relentless efforts many books and pamphlets were produced. In the meanwhile, Dhammawati had become not only the leader in religious education and ritual innovation but also the undisrupted center for Theravāda Buddhist laywomen. By contrast, in Dharmakirti, *upāsikās* not only had access to Dhamma training, which in the past had been closed to them but also with regard to the running of and planning for the temple, they had at least as much input as men.

In Nepal, at present there are sixty nunneries. The nuns live alone or in small groups. Nearly half of them are elderly and working hard to establish the Dhamma. But they need an organization to unite, coordinate and strengthen the activities of the Nepalese nuns' community. In February 1988, Ven. Dhammawati took part in the First International Conference on Buddhist Nuns, in Bodhgaya, India. In 1988, along with other nuns, she received higher ordination as a *bhikkhuni* at Hsi Lai Temple, Los Angeles. These women form the nucleus of the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in Nepal. This process still continues in Nepal.





A Palm Tree in the Pure Land

Yi-hsun Huang

Pure Land practice, known in Buddhism as an “easy path to salvation,” is welcomed by numerous Buddhist practitioners, regardless of their age, capacity, or gender. This paper investigates the reasons why Pure Land belief, in contrast to other Buddhist practices, is regarded as the most compelling and available practice for female Buddhist practitioners. It begins with a textual summary of the *Longer Sukhāvatīvyūha Sūtra*, the primary textual basis for the practice.

The *Longer Sukhāvatīvyūha Sūtra* begins with a dialogue between Śākyamuni Buddha and Ānanda about the monk Dharmākara and his wish to establish an ideal Buddha land for all sentient beings. This ideal Buddha land is popularly known as the Pure Land. The *sūtra* highlights the 48 vows made by Dharmākara, which are said to be necessary for achieving perfect awakening. The Pure Land is described as a perfect realm where there is no evil, no suffering, no difference in appearance between humans and gods, and no limit on the length of a being’s lifespan. In the eighteenth of these vows, Dharmākara promises that, except for those who have committed the five grave transgressions and those who have slandered the Dharma, any living being who generates for ten moments the single-minded desire to be born in the Pure Land can gain rebirth there. Thus, every being is assured of attaining awakening in the Pure Land.¹ This promise, of course, includes women.

In China, Pure Land practice gradually developed into a simple form of practice: the recitation of Amitābha Buddha’s name known as *nianfo*.² Daniel Stevenson describes Pure Land practice as a cult of the “inner household.” He says that Pure Land practice appeals a great deal to women, who can pursue

their religious goal within the family compound. Daniel Getz points out the growth of women's participation in Pure Land practice during the Sung dynasty.³

The growing popularity of Pure Land practice among women is evident in the *Collection of Accounts of Rebirth in the Pure Land (Wangshengji)* compiled by the Buddhist monk Zhuhong (1532-1612) in the Ming Dynasty and published in 1584.⁴ The *Wangshengji* contains 272 stories of Pure Land practitioners of various categories: monks, kings and nobles, laymen, nuns, women, evil-doers, and animals. There are 32 accounts of Buddhist women. These narratives provide us with material to explore women's understanding of suffering, death, the Pure Land, and salvation in China prior to the sixteenth century.

My paper focuses on the story of Madam Feng, a woman who lived during the Sung dynasty.⁵ Madam Feng was often ill when she was young, so a Chan master taught her to maintain a vegetarian diet, observe the precepts, and recite the name of Amitābha Buddha. She firmly believed what he taught her and practiced diligently for ten years. Suddenly, she felt weary with the world. People found this strange and wondered why she still had such a negative thought, since she had been living purely for such a long time. She replied, "My ties with the world have already expired and it is time for me to go to the Pure Land. What is strange about this?" When she approached the moment of her death, her breathing stopped, but then she suddenly came back to life. She said to her family members, "I have gone to the Pure Land and seen Amitābha Buddha's abode. It is not different from what is described in the *Flower Ornament Sūtra* and the *Contemplation Sūtra*." And then she died. Three days later, her body still looked as if she were alive and emitted a rare sweet fragrance.

This story is similar to the life of Ms. Zheng, a successful businesswoman currently living in the United States whom I met when I participated in a seven-day Pure Land recitation retreat at Chuang-Yen Monastery in New York. Ms. Zheng is originally from Taiwan and had a furniture business when she first immigrated to America. Although her mother was a devout Pure Land believer, she was not. She told me that she stubbornly believed that she did not need any religion to support her life.

Unfortunately, Ms. Zheng was diagnosed with cancer when she was in her mid-forties. Her mother advised her to recite Amitābha's name, because she wanted her to go to a "good place" if she did not survive. After she survived her battle with cancer, Ms. Zheng became a Pure Land practitioner, because she felt that the Pure Land teachings taught her to face life and death with courage and grace. She closed her furniture business and opened a vegetarian restaurant, the Palm Tree, in New York City. She believes that helping people to decrease their bad karma by providing them with vegetarian food gives meaning to her life. During the many conversations I had with her, Ms. Zheng

often told me that reciting Amitābha's name at the end of a busy day always brings her spiritual joy. She mentioned that she was no longer afraid of death, because she knows where she will be going after she dies.

Although these two women lived in different places and time periods – Madam Feng in the Sung dynasty and Ms. Zheng in modern times – Pure Land belief influenced their lives in similar ways. The belief in rebirth in a Pure Land after death helped both of them overcome obstacles in their lives. Both were devoted to Pure Land practice with gratitude and deep faith. For this reason, each showed no fear of death or attachment to life at the time of death. The Pure Land teachings helped each of them to envision the value and goal of life. Each planted a tree in the Pure Land during her lifetime and was confident that the practice would bear fruit in the future. These two stories demonstrate the importance of Pure Land practice for Buddhist women – a practice that bridges time and place, and continues to bring meaning to women's lives today.

NOTES

1. T 12. 319a27-320b26. For further information, see Daniel Stevenson, "Pure Land Buddhist Meditation and Worship in China," in *Buddhism in Practice* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 359-79. Luis Gomez discusses a related topic not covered in this paper in his article, "Can Women Be Born in the Pure Land as Women?" *The Land of Bliss* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986), pp. 166-70.
2. As for a detailed discussion on the development of Pure Land practice, see Stevenson, "Pure Land Buddhist Worship and Meditation in China," pp. 359-79.
3. Daniel Getz, "T'ien-t'ai Pure Land Societies" in *Buddhism in the Sung* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999), pp. 496-97.
4. *The Wangshengji*. T 51, pp. 144c1-8.
5. T 51, p. 144c4-8. This translation is based on an unpublished translation by Barbara Buhr.





Overcoming Tradition: Reconstructing and Transforming the Role of Korean Buddhist Nuns through Education

Bongak Sunim

In order to examine the modern educational system for Korean Buddhist nuns, I will cover three main topics. First, I will briefly discuss the history of Korean Buddhist nuns. Next, I will focus on the modern educational system of Korean nuns. Last, I will discuss the important contributions of nuns to the future of Korean Buddhism.

Buddhism was officially introduced to the Korean peninsula in the late fourth century CE. King Fu Chien, of the former Chinese Ch'in Dynasty, dispatched the monk Sundo as his personal envoy to the Koguryo king Sosurin (371-384), together with Buddhist statues and scriptures. The first recorded female lay Buddhist was Morye's sister, Sassi, who later became a Buddhist nun. During the Silla Dynasty, King Beobheung (514-539) and King Jinheung (540-575) retired and became Buddhist monks. Their wives also became nuns.

According to *The Book of the Three Kingdoms' Period*, nuns were appointed to the official position of Ani to supervise the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha. Furthermore, in *The Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms' History*, it is mentioned that a Buddhist nun named Jihye received help from a mysterious heavenly being when she attempted to renovate her temple. Other documents tell of a nun who helped cure Kyungheung, a great Korean monk of the Silla Kingdom. From these records we can see evidence of nuns' religious influence at the time.

Korean Buddhism was introduced to Japan from the kingdom of Baekje. Twenty-five years later, a Baekje king sent Buddhist monks and nuns who

specialized in Vinaya, meditation, and incantations, as well as temple carpenters and craftsmen, to Japan. In 584 CE, three Japanese nuns – Seonshin, Hyeseon, and Seonjang – became students of the Koguryo monk Hyepyeon and crossed the sea to the Baekje kingdom to receive *bhiksunī* ordination. When they returned to Japan three years later, they contributed to building a foundation for Japanese Buddhism.

As illustrated in the above records, Korean nuns have played significant roles since the beginnings of Korean Buddhism. Moreover, we can see that women of high social class became Buddhist nuns. We can also see that many nuns played important roles in saving people from hardships and suffering.

In addition to historical materials of the Three Kingdoms period and the Silla Dynasty, there are many references, albeit fragmentary, to nuns in the Koryo and Choson Dynasties. For example, in *The Book of Koryo History*, it is recorded that a monastery for nuns called Jeongeobwon was constructed. It is also recorded that many high-class women became Buddhist nuns and frequently participated in Dharma services. It is true that women sometimes became nuns to escape their hopeless situations. Yet during the devastating persecution of Buddhism in the Choson Dynasty, laywomen's faith and activities helped Buddhism survive. Furthermore, there were numerous nameless nuns who helped laywomen in their efforts to preserve Buddhism and ensured that the nuns' lineage continued unbroken on the Korean peninsula.

When Buddhism was first introduced to Korea during the 'Three Kingdoms' Period, the Buddhists' focus was primarily on the study of scriptures (Kyo). Chinese Chan or Sŏn Buddhism was introduced at the end of the Unified Silla Kingdom (668-935). In the Koryo period (937-1392), the Nine Mountain Schools (Kusan Sonmun) were founded. Thus, the traditions of both Buddhist scriptural study and Sŏn practice co-existed. Furthermore, state examinations and official positions for Buddhist monks were established for both scriptural and Sŏn schools during the Koryo period.

There was a movement to harmonize Kyo (scriptural study) and Sŏn (practice) in the middle of the Koryo period. The great Korean monk Euichon (1055-1101) advocated unity of Kyo and Sŏn based on the teaching of the *Lotus Sūtra*. Another important figure, the great Korean Sŏn master Chinul (1158-1210), advocated practicing Sŏn together with the study of scriptures. The practice of both Kyo and Sŏn has become an important aspect in Korean Buddhist monastic education.

During the Choson Dynasty, Neo-Confucians enacted a policy of suppressing Buddhism and promoting Confucianism. During this period, the system of official posts and examinations for monks was abolished. In the middle of the Choson Dynasty, monks focused on Sŏn practice as well as the study of Buddhist scriptures. This method of combining Buddhist scriptural

study and Sŏn practice has been the main principle of monastic education since the seventeenth century. The traditional three major forms of Buddhist training are: ethical restraint (*sīla*), mental concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*prajñā*) – standard dictums that find application in nearly all methods of Buddhist practice. They are also the fundamental monastic disciplinary guidelines of the Korean Buddhist tradition.

In 1994, the Chogyŏ order reorganized the Korean Buddhist educational system, into five parts: (1) primary education, (2) basic education, (3) expert education, (4) re-education, (5) specialized education. At the primary education level, the postulants (*haengja*) go through a period of disciplined training, developing their commitment and devotion to Buddhist practice. After completing a year-long initial training period under the personal guidance of their teachers, all Korean postulants are expected to participate in a month-long joint training session. The postulants are ordained as novice nuns and monks (*śrāmaṇerikās* and *śrāmaṇeras*) only after passing a thorough qualifications during this primary education period.

The qualifications are usually strict. The postulants must be under a certain age, have at least a high school diploma, and maintain all regulations set by the Buddhist Educational Department. After being ordained as *śrāmaṇerikās*, novice nuns receive further training under the guidance of their nun teachers for an additional year. The novice nuns should familiarize with leading chanting services and rituals, and have a basic understanding of Buddhist doctrine.

At the second stage of their education, Korean nuns can choose to attend the Buddhist *gangwon* (monastic seminaries and training monasteries) or Buddhist universities. By providing novice nuns with several options, the educational process takes into account the diverse backgrounds and dispositions of students. Nevertheless, the *gangwon* often serves as the center for the second stage of education. Since the *gangwons* are usually located in remote mountain monasteries, they provide an ideal environment for intensive study of Buddhist scriptures. There are five traditional *bhikṣuṇī gangwons* in Korea: Donghaksa Temple, Bongnyeongsa Temple, Unmunsa Temple, Chongamsa Temple, and Samseon Gangwon. Every year about 300 *śrāmaṇerikās* enroll in the *gangwons*. In addition to these *gangwons*, Joongang Saṅgha University and Dongguk University are designated educational institutes. For those who want to pursue Sŏn practice, these are many meditation facilities for nuns.

Today the traditional Buddhist educational system, the *gangwon*, still serves as the main educational resource for Buddhist monks and nuns in Korea. The curriculum of the *gangwon* is divided into four stages: (1) the *śrāmaṇerikā* course (*sami-kwa*), (2) the Fourfold Collection Course (*sajip-kwa*), (3) the Four Teachings Course (*sagyo-kwa*), (4) the Great Teachings Course (*taegyo-kwa*). Monks and nuns can sometimes extend their education by choosing the

Independent Course (*suui-kwa*) or other optional courses. At the *gangwon*, monks and nuns study the Chinese Sŏn masters' writings, along with the *sūtras* and the Abhidharma.

During four years of education at the *gangwon*, nuns are trained to be fully ordained. They learn an upright attitude and establish a clear direction for their practice. They study the basics of Buddhist doctrine and are trained in the skills of teaching the Dharma to lay Buddhists.

The *gangwons* and Buddhist universities strive to meet the demands of modern society. These educational institutes seek to train nuns who can be the future teachers of Buddhism. The nuns must master all necessary Buddhist knowledge, Dharma talk techniques, and also learn to practice social service, and missionary work.

Practitioner nuns devote themselves to Sŏn practice at meditation monasteries and exclude all scholarly works. Such a system trains meditation specialists, but there is some disagreement about whether meditation monasteries are appropriate places for the thorough education of nuns. The three remaining education programs – expert education, re-education, and specialized education – are available at two Buddhist monastic seminaries for nuns, Unmunsa Temple and Bongnyeongsa Temple.

Eighty percent of Korean Buddhists belong to the Choegye order, the largest Korean Buddhist order. The number of nuns roughly equals that of monks in the Choegye order. If we include nuns of other Buddhist sects in Korea, there are about 7,000 nuns active in Korea. Despite the difficult beginnings of the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha in Korea, we have the honor of having an unbroken history of women practitioners.

Today Koreans must attempt to harmonize Korean traditional values with modernity. Our obligations can be met by both religious practice and social service. To lead the life of a Buddhist, we should understand the Buddha's teachings correctly. We should neither be content with old traditions nor recklessly run after modernity.

How can a society maintain its traditions while being open to new ideas and cultures? These are the pressing issues that monks and nuns face. Sometimes traditional values clash with new ideas. Some monks and nuns of the old generation insist on traditional values and are not aware of rapidly changing modern society. At the same time, some old Buddhist traditions do not appeal to the new generation. Regardless of how virtuous and splendid the old traditions and ancient relics of Buddhism are, if we cannot address the issues facing modern society, we will become irrelevant.

Korean Buddhists are interested in transforming the roles of nuns. We are beginning to realize the special importance of nuns' role, and trying to overcome social barriers through education. In the Korean Buddhist Saṅgha,

the problem of inequalities between monks and nuns definitely exists. Important positions in the Saṅgha are occupied by monks. Nuns are not appointed to be abbots at *ponsa* (monastic headquarters). Still, Korean monks and nuns have equal opportunities for education. Korean nuns have opportunities to use their education to create new roles for Buddhism in modern society. Even though Korean nuns are being discriminated against in the male-dominated Saṅgha, nuns fulfill their duties by disseminating the Buddha's teachings and meeting the demands of society as religious leaders and teachers.

Many people acknowledge that Korean nuns are at the forefront of both embodying Buddhist values in modern society and in preserving indigenous Korean traditions. For example, nuns protect the environments of their monasteries, educate the young and the old, renovate historical monasteries, and preserve Buddhist culture by specializing in the arts, music, and other skills. Nuns are able to fulfill their roles because of their access to education. With the help of educational resources like the *gangwon* and Buddhist universities, nuns can cultivate their minds, practice religious discipline, and continue to play important roles in Korean society.





Transforming Instead of Slaying the 'Red Dragon'

Yeshe Chökyi Lhamo

The view that the female body is polluted is a widespread phenomenon in many cultures, religions, and societies, and is by no means unique to popular Buddhist discourse.¹ In general, Buddhism deems the body to be a filthy entity that is useful insofar as it is the vehicle to attain enlightenment. Because it is impermanent and thus subject to decay, and because it emits foul substances, Buddhist scriptures draw a rather negative picture of the human body. Nonetheless, it seems that *sūtras* neither depict the female body as dirtier than the male, nor do they promulgate the view that women are polluted. Still, some Buddhist scriptures do represent the female body in quite derogatory terms,² which must be understood within the socio-cultural context of the texts' creation. The depictions were aimed at monks as a means to overcome their attachment to women. They were never intended as a source of women's degradation, let alone of their spiritual capacities.

Quite the contrary, the Buddha clearly told Ānanda that women have the same potential to attain enlightenment as men. Despite scriptural testimony to the equality of both sexes with regard to spiritual practice and embodiment, many Taiwanese Buddhists still believe that women's spiritual potential falls short of men's. Indeed, popular Buddhist discourse perpetuates such a view. This comes to light in the belief that women stop menstruating as their spiritual prowess increases. Moreover, many women are told not to meditate when menstruating or during pregnancy. Such notions unambiguously elevate the spiritual status of men. They simultaneously suppress the feminine and restrain the spiritual practice of Buddhist women. Spiritual practice is the

very basis for attaining enlightenment. Thus, by curtailing the self-esteem and spiritual cultivation of women, these beliefs seriously endanger the attainment of women's enlightenment.

This paper aims at bridging the gap between Chinese traditional views of the female body, Western feminist views, and Vajrayāna Buddhist practice. I believe that many Taiwanese Buddhist women could benefit greatly from other traditions. Rather than rejecting their bodies and the feminine, they could put an end to such suppressive views and instead transform their embodiment into an advantage in their spiritual practice. This paper is based on fieldwork in Taiwan during 1999 and between 2001-2002, as well as my own experience as a female Buddhist novice in Taiwan. I will first relate some of my experiences as a novice before analyzing empirical and archival data.

During my stay in Taiwan as a novice, I was shocked to learn about the androcentrism that pervades Taiwanese Buddhism. Often I was told that I was “*zhuangyan* (splendid)” because I allegedly look like a man, a viewpoint that had never occurred to me before. Upon probing, interlocutors mostly connected this physicality with spiritual prowess. I found this view very restrictive. To me, it seemed that spiritual aptitude is reflected in our thought and actions, and not in our looks.

In 1999, my Chinese teacher told me to hurry up if I wanted to have kids, because good female practitioners would stop menstruating. He said that he had met a nun who claimed to have stopped menstruating, but he did not remember the details of the encounter. Moreover, he told me not to meditate during menstruation – advice I regarded as pure misogyny and which I simply ignored.

In 2001, my Buddhist flat-mate came out of her room, swearing: “*Zhangai! Zhangai!*” Astonished, I asked her what was wrong and she told me that she fell asleep during meditation because of her upcoming “MC (menses).” She reacted in a very surprised way when I asked her why menses should be associated with attachment. She replied, “Aren't we born women because of attachment?” I told her that I did not think so, since I remembered a monk who fell asleep during a Mahākala *pūjā* and doubted that he dozed off due to his upcoming “MC.” This woman, who was in her late 20s, has been rejecting her femininity since adolescence. She still strives to look and behave like a man, claiming that she has never been like a girl or woman. Another woman in her late 30s, whom I met in 1999, maintained that she stopped menstruating, and reacted with embarrassment when sanitary napkins fell out of her handbag. Like the younger respondent, she not only tried to dress and look like a man, she even tried to conceal her menstruation and had adapted traditionally male habits, for instance, smoking a pipe and checking out women. Because she allegedly remembered her previous life, in which she claims she was a man, she now sees herself as a man in a woman's body.

Unlike these two informants, another woman in her late 40s did not suppress her femininity, but claimed that her menses ceased for a short period of time when she was living at her master's temple. She told me that, at one time, she did not menstruate blood. Her uterus produced a golden-colored uterine liquid. Instead of feeling pain, she had a wonderful feeling in her uterus that made her very comfortable. However, the day her friend talked her into buying nice underwear, she started menstruating again. She believes this happened because she grasped at her female form again instead of remaining "male/female."

These three examples provide evidence of struggles with femininity. They show different ways of living a "male/female" life in a female body, clearly indicating that spiritual potential is linked to the emasculation of female practitioners and to the cessation of menstruation. Menstruation is seen as a hindrance to spiritual practice and as a sign of attachment and defilement. Its cessation, by contrast, is taken to attest to advanced spiritual practice. The two women who claimed to have stopped menstruating did so in a very secretive manner when talking about their spiritual accomplishments, while the youngest mentioned menstruation in connection with obstacles she faced in her spiritual practice. Hence these three examples testify to the existence of a belief that menstruation ceases as spiritual prowess increases.

I have not yet talked to a large number of women about these issues and further reflection warrants extensive fieldwork. It is worth noting, however, that most women I spoke to are aware of this belief and most took it at face value, yet only one remembered where she learned of this theory. The first of the three respondents related to me that her (male) monastic teacher told her that women stop menstruating when they reach the level of stream-enterer. She did not know why and said that her teacher did not elaborate on this point. In spite of this, there is a doctrinal element that warrants speculation. There is a theory that because stream-enterers have extinguished all afflictions, they are no longer subject to the form realm. Hence, female stream-enterers are distinguished by the cessation of menstruation. The correlation is clear: uterine blood can be equated with afflictions; a stream-enterer is an advanced practitioner who is free of such afflictions.

In many cultures, menstruation is linked to heightened sensitivity, also known as PMS. A good practitioner is not only free from conflicting emotions, one way of interpreting PMS, but also of desire, which might well be seen as manifest in menstrual blood.³ It is thus the connection of menstrual blood, desire, and mental afflictions that causes Taiwanese Buddhists to deem uterine blood and PMS as obstacles to spiritual practice. The belief that spiritual prowess is linked with the cessation of menstruation reveals that many Taiwanese Buddhist women reject their female bodies. In ceasing to menstruate, they

slay rather than ascend “the red dragon,” an epithet for menstrual blood. But another indigenous Chinese tradition, internal alchemy, uses the “red dragon” as a resource in spiritual practice. Taiwanese Buddhist practitioners could equally employ menstruation as a resource, as a source of contemplation.

Vajrayāna Buddhism, for example, requires practitioners to perform their practice daily, a commitment that does not allow for the interruption of spiritual practice. Furthermore, Vajrayāna Buddhism aims at transforming every aspect of our life into spiritual practice. In this context, PMS, menstruation, and pregnancy can be used to deepen realizations. They provide the opportunity to regularly reflect on Buddhist teachings, an opportunity men lack. Rather than being regarded as a drawback of women’s embodiment, these aspects of women’s lives can be seen as their contemplative and spiritual advantage.

First, for renunciants, menstruation raises questions about our commitment to renounce *samsāra*, since, the body reminds us of its procreative capacity on a monthly basis. This is very positive, for it conjures up doubts. We have to face the fact that our biological clock is ticking. Unlike male monastics, we do not have the option of renouncing our renunciation at an advanced age to procreate, thus we are forced to face doubts about our procreative capacity much more intensively and more frequently than monks do. Furthermore, we have the opportunity to develop a greater sense of disgust for *samsāra* due to abdominal pain, which reminds us of the fact that life is suffering. This deepens our renunciation greatly and renunciation is the gateway to enlightenment.

Similarly, if we suffer from PMS (which may decrease if we follow a vegetarian diet and meditate regularly), we are given the opportunity to face up to psychological hindrances we have failed to deal with. Many women have related to me that their menstruation brings up suppressed emotions. If these emotions are dealt with constructively, without being projected onto other people, they can help us understand defilements and egocentrism on a very deep level. Moreover, menstruation reminds us of the brevity of the human lifespan. On a monthly basis, we are automatically encouraged to practice or work harder, for we are well aware of the fact that another month of our life has passed, bringing us another month closer to our death. Thus menstruation is conducive to contemplation on impermanence.

The pain we may feel not only evokes reflection on the first noble truth, but it also reminds us of the fact that roughly half of humanity suffers in the same way we do. Not only that, but many women suffer much more than we do as a result of their embodiment. Thus we are able to develop compassion. By realizing that we are unable to help these women, we develop *bodhicitta*, the altruistic intention to free all living beings from suffering. At the same time, we can become aware that our negative karma is decreasing, for suffering is recognized as decreasing our stock of demerits. Menstruation also provides us

with an opportunity to meditate on dependent arising, which may encourage us to meditate on emptiness, for neither menstruation nor the menstruating women exist inherently, and neither does the culturally constructed stigma attached to them.

In addition, menstruation purifies us both karmically and physically. As with most processes that are charged with *qi* loss by Chinese medicine, menstruation is about losing, letting go, and renewal. This is probably why menstruation is associated with attachment. On a much deeper level, menstruation encourages us to understand that everything that exists is ultimately a creation of our own mind. We create our own suffering and we will suffer as long as we discriminate between suffering and happiness. We might not be able to stop menstruating the moment we let go of our aversion toward it, but we may be able to put a halt to the culturally induced suffering we believe we must endure. We can transform our embodiment into a source of contemplation rather than rejecting our bodies and our female identity. We can be free to celebrate the female body rather than praying for a male rebirth, a practice that seems to be commonplace in Taiwanese and Vajrayāna Buddhism. And we can learn to consider the female body as a vehicle capable of carrying us to the doorstep of liberation.

NOTES

1. See Douglas (1966) for details.
2. Wilson, 1996.
3. For details, see Yeshe Chökyi Lhamo, “The Fangs of Reproduction: An Analysis of Taiwanese Menstrual Pollution in the Context of Buddhist Philosophy and Practice” *History and Anthropology* 14: 2(2003) 157-78.





From Home to Buddhist Monastery: Links Between Female Lay Buddhists and Buddhist Nuns

Chang-Huey Yang and Chang-Yi Chang

This study addresses the perceived weakness of using contemporary women's practice in religious space as normative for understanding women in classical commentaries. By commenting on the realization of space for female devotees and the interactions between space and sacredness in women's experience, it returns to women the power over space they should have. Correlating the process through which women practice their beliefs and their activities in sacred spaces helps us understand women's use of sacred space. Assessing the approaches taken in studies on sacred space, we find that views and opinions are becoming increasingly diversified. This is a reflection of the changing nature of sacred space and the ways it intertwines with the secular world. However, scholars of geography have not sufficiently addressed women's issues or the significance of gender.

This paper discusses the interaction between sacred and profane space in urban Buddhism, and the significance of women's Buddhist activities within sacred space. The study reassesses the religious activities performed by Buddhist nuns and laywomen, the ways in which female devotees' typical religious activities are linked to social networks in the public sphere, and the interaction between body and sacred space among Buddhist nuns and laywomen. It examines the significance of temple space as intermediate between the sacred and secular worlds, bringing women out of their homes into the public sphere using a common religious experience. In this space, the seemingly familiar woman appears in and blends with the temple space.

Gender and Sacred Space

In the past, the religious landscape was regarded as the center of social activity, consolidating peripheral forces and views to form the religious sphere. The dynamic expansion of religious spaces was due to returning migrants, mostly men, who earned funds to build magnificent local temples. In this way, they earned a feeling of return and reflected glory on their ancestors. A woman's role in the religious sphere was to live with her husband's family and perform sacrifices with his clansmen. However, social transformation brought alienation and reorganization among urban relatives, and the connections between urban women and sacred space also changed rapidly. The construction of local monasteries connected local female devotees and pulled them out from domestic sacred spaces to sacred spaces in the public sphere. The result was a diversification of female devotees' images of sacred space. These images were connected to contemporary Taiwanese societal structures and historical processes, presenting a lively picture of Taiwanese Buddhist women as the principle participants in religious ritual activities.

The gathering of women to pray in sacred spaces is common to Chinese and other societies. The intense religious practice of contemporary women in sacred spaces has produced outstanding religious women. However, in the classics, religious women were restricted by the mood of the times and a negative view of the female body. Women faced many religious taboos and were subject to supervision; it is questionable whether women had any independence in sacred space. Here, the conflicts and contradictions in both the normative and conceptual aspects of women's religious activities raise questions about how women used the spaces in their religious practice to facilitate the symbolic interaction between their bodies and the space. Looking at women in different dimensions of sacred space – the home, the temple, the monastery – this study explores the interaction between body and space, and women's rights of expression in this space.

Specifically, this study looks at daily religious activities in geographical space, integrating the area of activity and the religious practices of Buddhist women in Taiwan. It focuses on the performance of rituals by nuns in the prayer space, the significance of body symbolism (the power to reflect on life experience in the secular world and to leave the home), the interaction between Buddhist women and the local community, and the ability of Buddhist laywomen to reproduce religious concepts at home. The integration of these concepts is a commentary on the social space of Taiwan's Buddhist women, their religious activities, and the interaction between Buddhist nuns and laywomen, connecting the overall network of spaces and images of female devotees.

This study involves women engaged in socially unauthorized professions, which traditionally include:

Women with disreputable or illegitimate professions: Buddhist nuns, Taoist nuns, female fortune tellers, female trading in humans, female media, witches, brothel madams, medical practitioners, midwives. It has been determined that very few people engaged in these professions were not involved in rape or theft.¹

From a modern perspective, these women are not only professional women, but they are also women who break through certain social barriers and interact in the public sphere.² Among them, nuns and fortune tellers hold a religious status. The past negative societal attitudes toward these socially active women had a deep effect on them. Here, the concern is the interaction between gender and social position created by religious women.

Scholars of anthropology, history, sociology, and Western Buddhist feminists see traditional religious structures from differing points of view. An analysis of the goddess and real women divides these women into three types: virgin, prostitute, and housewife. The image of the virgin is the incarnation of the goddess's purity. The prostitute and the goddess share the characteristic of being women in the public sphere. The demand for kindness and filial piety is the standard demand for housewives. Female devotee are divided into female clergy and secular women, both with different lifestyles and requirements within the cultural framework, but both copy a gender role logic in practice.

Past studies into Taiwan's religious geography have always made humanism their guiding principle. The model for the typical "person" in this humanist approach is criticized by feminists because the research on sacred space is directed by male values. In other words, women are often invisible and nameless, even though most religious devotees are women. Where does that leave the study of sacred space in past gender studies?

In the domestic sacred space, women (particularly married mothers) do not have a blood relation to the ancestors to whom they make sacrifices. Via the marriage relationship, they sacrifice to the ancestors of their husbands. The husband sometimes lives with his wife's family, but that is less common. According to Chinese tradition, women only make these sacrifices once they are married. Therefore, when a young, unmarried woman dies, there is a folk tradition of organizing a wedding ceremony for the deceased, so that she will receive sacrifices continuously. Ordinarily this participation begins during the first month of motherhood, when the mother begins to pray to the gods of childraising. During these sacrificial activities, women follow existing gendered patterns. The gendered division of labor is displayed in women's

formal sacrificial activities in sacred space, but does not significantly touch on the spiritual significance or subjective experience of the women who perform these ceremonial activities. How does the domestic sacrificial space connect with and respond to a broader social network of sacred spaces?

Traditionally, South Korean Buddhists drew a very clear line between temples for male and female worship. Male temples were clearly distinguished from temples where women sacrificed. A similarly clear division of space is found in Islam, where taboo-like regulations govern women entering sacred space. Debates about sacred space involve taboos concerning the female body and extend to prejudices against and exclusions of women.

Women carry out prescribed duties at the sacred space, but due to social and cultural taboos are often excluded from the sacred space itself. In traditional temples, women can be seen burning incense and worshipping, and the humming sound of their prayers can be heard, but the public space under the tree outside the hall or temple is reserved for men. Male identification and belonging are closely connected to this space. Women's public space is the riverside where they do the laundry, and their social identification is built at the market. Today, observation of the lives of women involved in Tzu-chi reveal an increased independent mobility, independent use of domestic space, expanded independent social exchanges, and a changed perception of themselves.³ What kind of religious mechanism initiates these positive effects and has the participation of female devotees in the public space truly been expanded by participation in religious activities?

The current diversity of opinions and viewpoints regarding sacred space reflect the changing character of this space and its interconnectedness with the secular world. Changes in local culture have resulted in a perception of the religious landscape as a cultural phenomenon. Religious concerns are also entering the language of social relationships and political identifications, as well as responsive interactions and sacred spaces in caregiving. Changes in these relationships and structures reflect a significant dynamism.

Chungtai Shan: A Case Study

Chungtai Shan is the main focus of the discussion of sacred space in this study. The completion of the central part of Chungtai Temple in 2001 was significant not only to religious circles, given the cultural landscape, carried rich spatial implications for the presentation of Dharma through appearance. The image of the World of Chungtai was reflected not only in physical monasteries and temples throughout the island, but also in an emphasis on expressing Buddhism's spiritual significance through spatial representations. Eliade's view of sacred space was the basis for observation and provided the logic for viewing

Chungtai's sacred space. The appearance and construction of sacred space in Eliade's view is as follows:

1. *Hierophany and signs.* Isolated from the surrounding environment and transcending the secular world, various open impressions are used to express the language of Chungtai Monastery. The interconnection between signal objects, such as the Dharma wheel, and auspicious appearances in religious activities, create a religious landscape where the Dharma wheel/sacred place/auspicious appearance coincide.

2. *The construction of the universe.* This is expressed as the universalization of the world, as opposed to the external chaotic world. The construction of Chungtai Temple symbolizes the creation of the universe, standardizing the significance of the world. Thanks to the function of hierophany, the universal aspects can be transcended and communication can be established among the three aspects of the universe: the mortal world, heavenly realm, and hell.

Religion, as a central image, is both an image of the world and the center of the world. It can imply both the Buddhist world and Chungtai's ritual grounds – a place of true sanctity and the source of capability, ultimate dedication, life, and multiplicity. The secular world is an empty illusion and devotees thirst for sacred capabilities within this sanctified realm. Religious people use rituals to recreate the realm of the sacred, thus serving the function of sacred space. The World of Chungtai uses Chungtai Temple as a central nexus for consecrating the world and construct symbolic significance directly connected to the heavenly realm/transcendent monastery. Using sacred space in branch temples, a secondary level of central sacred space is formed on the local level, attracting devotees from neighboring areas. The tertiary level is the domestic sacred space where each devotee offers sacrifices and prayers. Using this kind of space stratification in the consecration process, the World of Chungtai has managed to successfully spread to the devotees' religious lives.

Sacred Space in Temples: Excluding Secular Matters and Entering the Mortal World

Most of Chungtai's temples in Taiwan are located in urban areas, mostly in northern Taiwan. The temples established during the ten years of development since the first temple was established 1992 are the result of donations of housing and remodeling, and the lease of houses for free by kindhearted, virtuous people. This highlights the difference between the majority of temples in cities and those in more remote areas. Ritual sites in remote areas strive to provide purity, silence, and an environment for clear and pure contemplation, while urban ritual sites emphasize the promotion of Buddhism. These urban

centers are based on charity and are convenient for helping the public. Temples offer classes in Buddhism and scripture study, and aim to facilitate urban Buddhist devotees' search for Buddhism. "Excluding secular matters" means that secular matters are excluded from the sacred space, even when the sacred space is located in the mundane world, the city.

In the sacred space, the symbolic images of the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha are related to the debate about the original nature of space. These images provide local spiritual meaning, which is why their placement in the temple space closely abides by commentaries on their significance and how they should be displayed in the space, thus satisfying people's sensory needs. As soon as one enters the main gate, there is a service desk for receiving guests. Usually lay Buddhists serve here. Monks and nuns have office and meeting space behind the front desk. Because the temple is a modified living compound, the original layout does follow the shape of the main monastery. Instead, sacred symbols define the atmosphere of the space. A hall and a Buddha image for veneration are obligatory. There is also a meditation hall and living quarters for the teachers. This is normally located on the top floor, separated from the ordinary living space below. The kitchen is mostly used by housewives from the neighborhood who take turns cooking. The temple includes small spaces for the three treasures – Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha. Here temple devotees change into Buddhist clothing, which differs from secular clothing. Unwritten rules and attitudes also differ from situations in ordinary space.

In the World of Chungtai, temple usage defies the Buddhist tradition that defines the temple as a residence for monks and nuns. Here, the temple has been redefined as an urban fount of purity that emphasizes the importance of lay Buddhists and devotees. The sacred space reaches out into the city, offering convenient access to Buddhist teachings and activities according to the special needs of local residents. It shrinks the distance between the secular world and sacred space by providing space where female lay Buddhists and Buddhist nuns can and connect and communicate.

Women and Their Habitual Living Space

Buddhist nuns are women practicing Buddhism outside of the home. Female lay Buddhists move between the domestic sacred space and the sacred space outside of the home. They spend little time in the sacred space outside of the home, and after leaving that sacred space, they return to secular space. The time spent in the two areas is not uniform or complete. By comparison, Buddhist women outside the home – Buddhist nuns – are fixed within the sacred space. The temple, the monastery and other related sacred space are the center of their goals and lives, and they see this sacred space as their

home. However, the significance of this home is that it dissolves family and blood relationships and ancestral worship. They are given new names and are subjected to strict traditional Buddhist discipline which define what the student sees, hears and says. Although the channels at their disposal are unitary and highly systemized, the religious experience invokes lifelong concern and goals. They are comparatively clear on what their personal quest is and they are comparatively more self-confident. The expanding scope of female activity does therefore not necessarily imply independence and improved personal goals.

Public Religious Space for Women

Temples were originally public spaces. When women paid their respects to and emulated gods in their sacrificial activities in order to study Buddhism, this was accepted and approved of by society. Women are seen in the image of a good mother and a good woman. For example, Matsu and Kuanyin are images of the merciful mother, and at the same time as chaste and undefiled. Such an image of the goddess is therefore another attempt by society to elevate the image of female sacrifice and contribution. Another image is the woman as someone waiting before the incense burning altar.

Society thus does not exclude women or oppose their participation in sacrificial activities and rituals of faith in the public sphere, because, in the end, women are happy to return to the home and continue fulfilling their gender roles. However, when women stay away from home for an extended period of time or even become nuns, it signals that their religious expectations are no longer satisfied by ancestral sacrifices and a quiet search for wealth. Instead, they integrate their own life plan and preferred career into the sacred space.

In the past, there were women with disreputable professions who were dissatisfied staying at home. In modern times, following a relaxation of domestic demands, more and more women participate in activities in the public sphere. More and more women are seen in religious spaces, burning incense and sacrificing in temples. From the 1980s onwards, when four large Buddhist monasteries slowly established themselves, more and more women in Taiwan began participating in rituals and religious activities. From the search for wealth and peace through folk beliefs to the search for transcendence of life and death in the Buddhist scriptures, religious meaning was increasingly found in studying Buddhism. Earlier, the public space in front of the temple was the social space of men, but women are now using this religious space as a channel for active involvement in the public sphere. Not only are they seen at the forefront of the sacred space in contemporary temples and monasteries, but they have also used their participation in religious activities to expand the scope of their activities in the public sphere in general.

The Reappearance of Temple Space

Temple space for women in the home indicates that they are able to use time fragments to help out in the neighborhood temple. The proximity of the space and the social contacts offered are important considerations for women in choosing a temple. Because their secular status is still that of a housewife with the accompanying duties, women's visits to temples – regardless of whether they are career women or housewives – are generally made during the time remaining after domestic duties are fulfilled. They make take a half day or a few hours for classes at the temple or meditation. When they visit the temple, they bring their children along and leave them in the care of the temple. On Wednesdays, children have just morning classes with the afternoon off, so children do their homework while mothers receive visitors in the temple. This is an example of the interaction between the secular household and the temple.

The temple grounds are a safe environment outside the home where housewives can go. Time is limited, but in this transition period, women can transfer the pressures encountered in the secular world/household life, including clothes, language, and mental state, to a sacred space filled with spiritual symbolism. The gods they pray to and venerate are no longer their ancestors, but rather the Buddha, implying eternity and the religious meaning they yearn for. It is no longer simply a matter of remembering ancestors or fulfilling the demands of filial piety; rather, it includes transcending the pressures of the secular world, leaving the home in the secular sphere and returning to the pure sphere of the Buddha.

Housewives only visit Chungtai Temple on a few specific occasions – seven-day Zen retreats, Buddhist assemblies, or semi-tourist activities – because for urban women the temple has a lofty significance. When a bus approached the temple, an unidentified woman said: “I am finally going home!” What does “home” mean in this context? When a woman leaves home to perform sacrificial rituals in a sacred space, each ritual is a process of leaving and returning. Leaving home is like a spiritual sauna and a return. Each departure from home (natal home and marriage) is also a kind of return, with Buddhism transcending the secular world. This spiritual home signifies a paradise without sickness or old age and a place where one transcends the karma and hindrances caused by unwholesome actions. Further, it can be home can imply a passive opposition to the female body and a belief that women's physiological is associated with impurity, contamination, and bad karma. When physical pressures in the secular world approach the emotional, one hopes to return to a connection with the sacred world where one can transcend physical hindrances and become temporarily immersed in sacred space. This

relieves pressure and prepares one to return to the home in the secular world. In the sacred space, a set of unstructured human relationships are found. The past is no longer used to interconnect blood relations; instead, the discourse of Buddhism is used to manage the body.

Through this intermediary sacred/secular space, women are drawn out of their homes into the public sphere, where similar women appear and intermingle in the temple space. The temple is defined as an intermediary connecting the monastery and the home, functioning as a dynamic space. The vocabulary in the temple space thus contains the language of the sacred female body – the Buddhist nun. However, female lay Buddhists can also bring the education of their children into the temple. For example, community residents in the temple offer classes oriented to the needs of community residents and classes for children to study Buddhist scriptures. These activities connect the experiences of women to the temple. There are also many local temple connections with deep local characteristics. The quality of the intermediary space vitalizes the urban Buddhist network. There are many local temples with deep local significance apart from Chungtai Shan, the center of the sacred space. The role of female devotees in the temples is to use the dynamic language of the temple's sacred space to further vitalize women's moving, leaving, and returning in the sacred space for Buddhist lay women and Buddhist nuns.

NOTES

1. "Women with Disreputable or Illegitimate Professions," in *Chuogenglu*.
2. Lin Huicheng, "Taiwan Chuantong Jiawudi Yishi Xingwei Ji Qi Kongjian Suo Yinbandi Jiawu Linian Yu Kongjianguan [Traditional Domestic Ritual Activities in Taiwan and the Domestic Ideals and View of Space Hidden in Domestic Space]" in *He Chenci Jiaoshou Qizhi Shouqing Lunwenji* [Festschrift in Honor of Professor He Chenci's 70th Birthday] (Taipei: Arch Books, 1990), pp. 101-36.
3. Lu Hwei-syin, (1999), *Xiandai Fojiao Nuxingdi Shenti Yuyan Yu Xingbie Chongjian: Yi Ciji Gongdehui Wei Li* [The Reconstruction of Modern Buddhist Women's Body Language and Gender: The Example of Tzu Chi Foundation] (Taipei: Institute of Ethnology Publications, Academia Sinica) 88 (1999): 275-311.





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BRIDGING WORLDS

Buddhist Women's Voices Across Generations

In 2002, an idyllic mountain setting in Taiwan was the stage for a meeting beyond the ordinary. Hundreds of students, teachers, spiritual seekers, and dedicated practitioners gathered at Huafan University for the Seventh Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women. Hosted by Bhiksuni Shig Hiu Wan, a Buddhist nun renowned for her painting, calligraphy, scholarship, and leadership, this heartwarming event bridged generations, nations, traditions, and worldviews in a week of dialogue and contemplation. The aim was to explore how women and Buddhist teachings can help bridge communications in a world greatly in need of compassionate understanding. This volume records some of the remarkable exchanges that transformed the hearts, perspectives, and lives of so many unique Buddhist women and their spiritual friends.

Karma Lekshe Tsomo is a professor of Buddhist Studies at the University of San Diego. She earned a doctorate in Comparative Philosophy from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, and speaks and writes extensively on Buddhist women and Buddhist ethics. Since 1987, she has played a key role in Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist Women, the Sakyadhita international conferences, and Jamyang Foundation, an educational initiative for women in developing countries.

